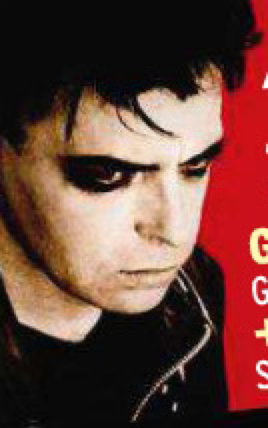


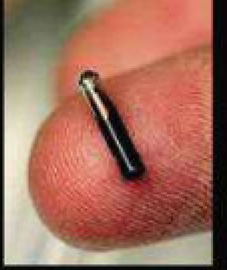
"IT HAPPENED TO ME..."

GARY NUMAN'S GHOSTLY ENCOUNTER

+ JOHN FOXX ON SURREAL CITIES

FUTURE VISIONS

THE SCIENCE OF PRECOGNITIVE DREAMING



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WHATEVER HAPPENED TO RICHARD III'S BODY?

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THE MYSTERY OF STREET LAMP INTERFERENCE

Write Your Way To A New Career!

Writers Bureau Celebrates Twenty-two Years of Helping New Writers

by Nick Daws

Hazel McHaffie

Tim Skelton

When distance-learning pioneer Ernest Metcalfe founded The Writers Bureau in the late 1980s, he can hardly have dared hope that twenty-two years on it would be acknowledged as Britain's leading writing school. Yet so it proved, with thousands of Writers Bureau students seeing their work in print for the first time. And, for many of those who persevered with their writing, the dream of becoming a successful writer has turned into reality.

Students such as Tim Skelton. An engineer by profession, he had always harboured an ambition to write, and at the age of 40 signed up with The Writers Bureau. The decision changed his life: "My writing career took off exponentially. In 2005 I started appearing regularly in lifestyle and in-flight magazines. The following year I was commissioned by Bradt Travel Guides to write a guidebook to Luxembourg. I've appeared in The Times and The Independent, and updated guidebooks for Fodor's, Thomas Cook, and the AA."

> *"My writing career took off exponentially."*

Another student who benefited was Hazel McHaffie. Hazel wanted to make her academic work in Medical Ethics more accessible to people, and decided to write the themes into novels. Following her Writers Bureau course, Hazel has had five novels published, and appeared at the Edinburgh International Book Festival in 2008. She also has her own website at www.hazelmchaffie.com.

Sometimes studying with The Writers Bureau takes students down new and unexpected paths. Patricia Holness originally enrolled on The Writers Bureau's Writing for Children course. However, she soon realised that what she was learning applied to other types of writing as well.

She is now a full-time writer, regularly selling short stories for both children and adults. She also has a monthly column in Devon Life.

These are just a selection from the inspirational true stories from students of The Writers Bureau. There's no reason why YOU couldn't be their next success story. With a 15-day free trial and money-back guarantee, there is nothing to lose and potentially a whole new career to gain! So why not visit their website at www.writersbureau.com or call on Freephone 0800 856 2008 for more information?

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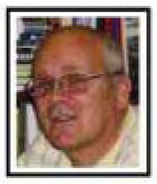

Michael Foley, Essex
"Completing The Writers Bureau course has made it possible for me to attain my life-long ambition of becoming a published writer. The level of success I have achieved has far outweighed what I was hoping for when beginning the course. By the end of this year I should have eight books already published and hopefully two more finished."

Cindy-Lou Dale, Kent
"I thought you'd like to know that seven years since doing my course at WB I've been published in more than 150 magazines around the world. I've now got to the stage where I'm turning down all-inclusive exotic press trips!"

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Dreams have long been thought to predict the future, and many people believe they have experienced highly accurate premonitions while fast asleep. Nonsense, says **RICHARD WISEMAN** – precognitive dreams can be easily explained by statistics and the science of sleep.

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Claims of people being implanted – perhaps by extra-terrestrials – with mysterious devices have circulated for years. This may not be mere paranoia and delusion, says **DAVID HAMBLING** – the real culprits may be closer to home.

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MIKITA BROTTMAN follows the latest fads, fashions and psychic styles in metaphysical media and tells us who's hot and who's not amongst celebrity clairvoyants.

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HILARY EVANS has been collecting accounts of streetlight interference for years, and concludes that, far from being mere folklore, people with the ability to turn off streetlamps as they pass are a genuine scientific mystery. We present a selection of 'SLIder' reports from around the world, taken from his new book.

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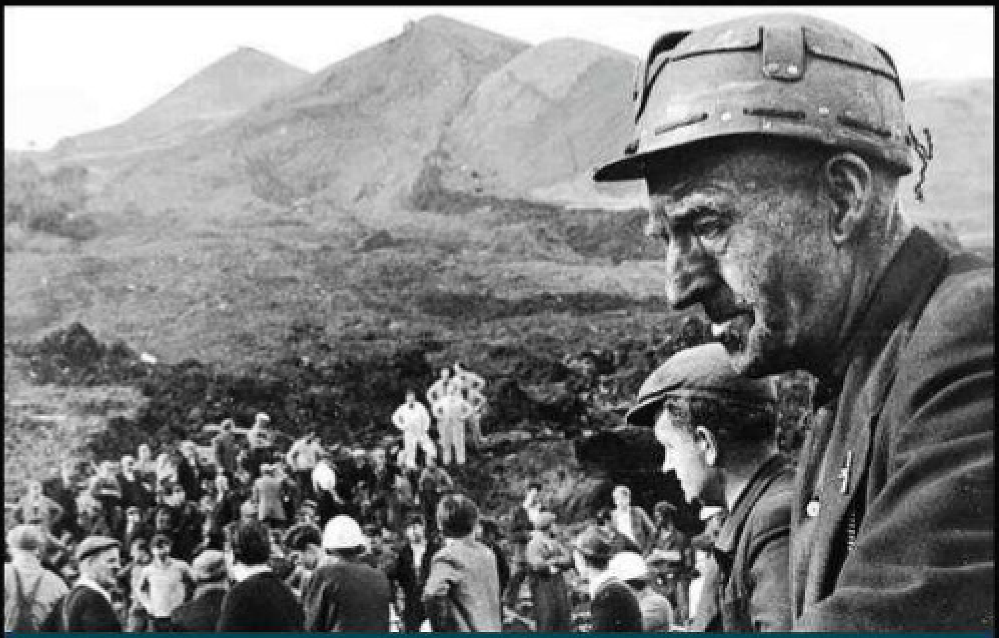

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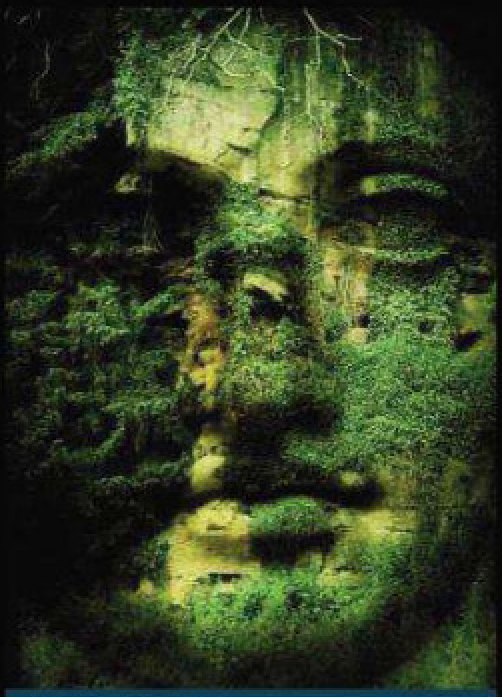

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The world of celebrity psychics

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editorial

Enlightened Times?

Welcome to a particularly packed (indeed, TARDIS-like) issue of *Fortean Times*, in which we go in search of the mysterious Grail-hunter Otto Rahn in the company of maverick film-maker Richard Stanley (pp28–34), investigate claims of precognitive dreaming with sceptical psychologist Richard Wiseman (pp36–39), talk to electro-pop pioneer John Foxx about science, surrealism and the modern city (pp40–43), survey the current state of media mediums with psychoanalyst Mikita Brottman (pp48–50), share first-hand accounts of Street Lamp Interference with Hilary Evans (pp52–55) – and much more besides.

"Someone is here, someone sad and lonely, desperately seeking attention... but enough about me"

MARTIN ROSS

Don't drink the water!

We also take a look at a couple of issues that have been exercising the conspiratorially minded for some time. Tiny, subcutaneous implants were a hot topic back in the 1990s, when a number of 'alien abductees' claimed to have been unwittingly fitted with them by little grey men; now, though, in our increasingly surveillance-driven society, such implants (and other, sometimes surprising, means of tagging and tracking the population at large) are very much a human technology. And one man – James Walbert – says he can prove he has been covertly tagged with a minute electronic device embedded in his left shoulder and used both to track and torture him. As David Hambling points out in his article (pp44–47), the big difference between Walbert's claim and many others doing the Internet rounds is that it appears to be backed up by hard evidence…

If that weren't enough, it seems the British government is now continuing down the road of "enforced medication". In his regular Science column (p14), David also looks back at the history of the fluoridation programme and its many opponents – the most recent being Southampton resident Geraldine Milner, who has mounted a legal challenge to the South Central Strategic Health Authority's decision to fluoridate her water. As we go to press, it has emerged that Ms Milner's challenge has failed: the high court has dismissed her demand for a judicial review (*Guardian, 11 Feb 2011*). It seems likely that this decision will lead to further efforts to fluoridate the drinking water supply in other parts of the country – and, no doubt, to renewed attempts to prevent this from happening. Watch this space.

Charlie's Aunt (well, great nephew actually)

We recently received an email from biologist and wildlife TV show host Pat Spain about his new series for the Nat Geo Wild Channel (plain Nat Geo for our US cousins). It turns out that Pat's great uncle was none other than… Charles Fort! His new five-part series – *Beast Man* – has, appropriately enough, a cryptozoological theme and sees him trekking through the world's deserts and jungles in search of such crypto-classics as Central Africa's mokole-mbembe, the Mongolian death-worm and Sumatra's orang-pendek. "I really tried to capture the sense of wonder my great uncle instilled in people… I know you'll enjoy this programme!" writes Pat. We hope to have a longer chat with him in a future issue of *FT*. In the meantime, the programme runs from late February in the UK and early March in the US; go to http://bit.ly/fhtGcw (natgeotv.com) for more info (for US viewers, that will be http://on.natgeo.com/hvjmhM (channel.nationalgeographic.com).

"Fortean Times, take us home to the Age of Reason!"

We were pleased to see that our "Giger's Goatsucker" story in **FT271** (in which Ben Radford revealed a perhaps surprising identity for the Puerto Rican *chupacabra*) made a big impression in an unexpected quarter when legendary loudmouth and iconoclastic journalist Julie Burchill picked up on it in her *Independent* column of 27 January. We know that no one would ever dare tell Julie what to think, which makes her a natural *FT* reader; but we were nevertheless pleasantly surprised to find ourselves – and the "brilliant" Ben Radford, author of the article – held up as a beacon of Enlightenment in an age of ever-increasing daftness, rampant superstition and uncritical consensus. "The other, smarter *FT*," Julie calls us (who are we to disagree?), ending her column with the injunction "*Fortean Times*, take us home to the Age of Reason!"

Well, Julie, we'll continue to do our best!

DAVID SUTTON
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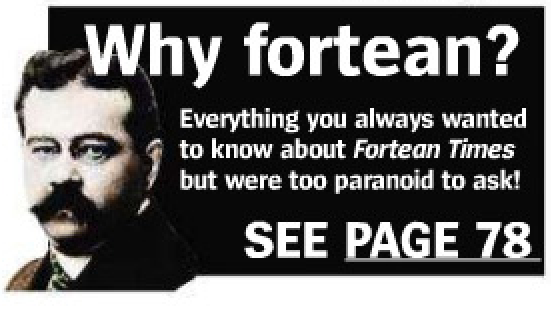
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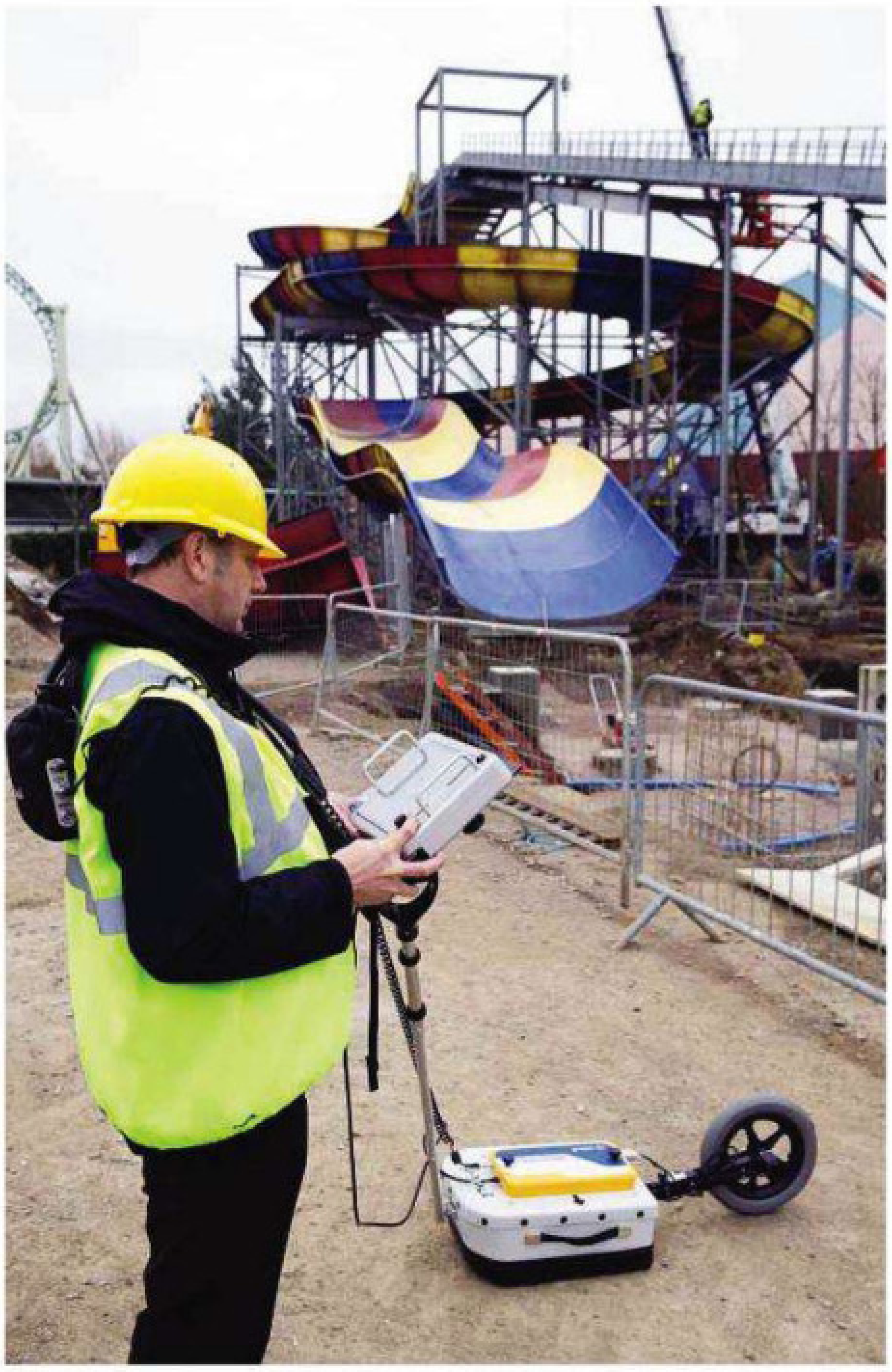
A haunting we will go...

Spectral presences at a theme park, the Royal Academy, an Asda supermarket and a hair salon

● A new ride at Thorpe Park in Chertsey, Surrey – one of the country's biggest theme parks – has been relocated because of alleged paranormal activity. Storm Surge, a 64ft (20m) water ride, was originally planned for an area known as Monk's Walk, an old footpath that linked the ruins of nearby Chertsey Abbey to Thorpe Church since AD 666 (a suspiciously specific date; is someone pulling our leg?). The ride's foundations would have been over a spot where stone coffins had previously been found. Workmen clearing the site reported sudden drops in temperature, feelings of being watched, objects moving of their own accord, and the apparition of a headless monk. No further details are provided. Park administrators called in an outfit called the Southwest London Paranormal Society. Jim Arnold, a spokesman for the group, said they had found ghostly images and orbs on photographs of the site, and what the *Sun* called "extreme Ouija board readings". They concluded that an ancient burial ground or settlement was being disturbed. Forensic geophysicist Peter Masters of Cranfield University was then called in to analyse the site, using deep ground radar. "From the preliminary investigations," he said, "we have picked up signatures similar to that of a burial ground – possibly ancient… the investigation is definitely worth continuing." *D.Mail, Sun, Metro, 7 Feb 2011.*



COURTESY THORPE PARK

LEFT: The Storm Surge ride at Thorpe Park was planned for Monk's Walk near Chertsey Abbey, but has been relocated after reports of sudden temperature drops, objects moving of their own accord, feelings of being watched, and the apparition of a headless monk.

> "...an ancient burial ground was being disturbed"

● Security guards at the Royal Academy in London have also been spooked by ghostly goings-on. Many wear headphones to block out sounds of apparitions such as the "screaming nun" who is said to haunt the Nuns' Walk at the rear of Burlington House. Security guard Nathan Phillips, 41, told of an experience he had during a 2am patrol near skeletons, which he admitted were creepy at the best of times. "On patrol, you walk past the bones area, go through the studios and then walk back the same way, pulling the doors shut behind you," he said. "When I got back to where the skeletons are, the doors all slammed shut – like boom, boom, boom. One after another. I tried to make out what it could be and checked all the doors again. I got to the same point in the same sequence and the bangs happened all over again. I didn't finish my patrol that night. It did freak me out. I'm a big, brave lad, ex-Army, I will fight anybody, but it did put the wind up me."

Last year, the guards' experiences were recorded by Blue Firth, a student at the Royal Academy Schools where some of the hauntings have been reported. She turned them into a series of artworks, including a portrait of a Mr Rushby who was keeper of the Schools from 1949 to 1964 and has been spotted near his old rooms since his death in 1968. Another of her artworks took old architectural drawings of the building to create a "ghost map" of a dozen places where unaccountable encounters had occurred. *Evening Standard, 5 Feb 2010.*

● Customers at an Asda supermarket in Crawley, West Sussex, have been spooked by a series of eerie happenings, reported the *Daily Star* (21 Oct 2010) under the irresistible headline "CREEPY CRAWLEY". Apparitions, flickering lights, moving

NO ONE DRIVING

Paranormal car crash and other motoring ghost stories

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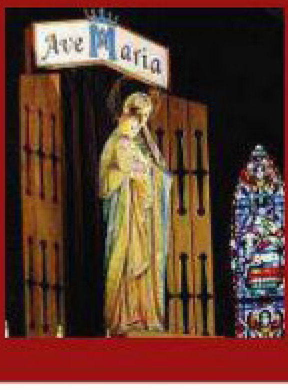

A HOLY APPARITION

Catholic Church recognises first US vision of Virgin Mary

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I SPY WITH MY TV EYE

Deported agent hosts fortean mysteries show on Russian telly

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groceries, howling noises and sudden drops in temperature – all the usual stuff – have been reported. The store was built in 2003 on the site of the demolished St Andrew's Presbyterian Church. "Rumour has it that a serial killer was once buried there", according to the report. "Things seem to happen especially when staff are on their own in a room," said an Asda insider. "They say they feel like they are being watched, then a heavy safety door will randomly shut."

● Sally Montague, manager of a hair salon in Derby, was looking at CCTV footage after a receptionist's purse was stolen and saw a ladder moving along the wall by itself. "The cellar has an entrance to a secret tunnel to the cathedral used by nuns," said Ms Montague. "Strange things are always happening – I wouldn't want to spend a night here!" *D.Mirror, 15 Jan 2011.*

HORSEMAN OF THE APOCALYPSE?

A video clip from MSNBC seems to show a horseman riding through a group of protesters on the streets of Cairo before the fall of Mubarak and emitting an eerie pale green glow before fading away. Internet commentators, hungry for portents of the Last Days, have referred to this apparition as the "pale horse" of the Apocalypse, but sceptics have pointed out that the apparent horse and rider move in perfect synchronisation with the camera pan, suggesting that it is something behind the camera reflected on a window between the lens and the street. There were, of course, "real" flesh-and-blood government supporters on horses and camels riding into the demonstrators, as seen in other footage. To see the clip, go to *http://bit.ly/gNCkEE (unexplainable.net) (accessed 4 Feb 2011).*

EXTRA! EXTRA! FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Eskimos come to rescue of Scottish sporran industry

D.Telegraph, 20 Sept 2010.

The reality of cremation can actually be a comfort

Milton Keynes Citizen, 13 May 2010.

Sales of new cars stuck in reverse

D.Mail, 7 Oct 2010.

Italy to combat prostitution by cutting trees

Guardian, 12 Oct 2010.

Hospital workers feared mad cow

Queensland Sunday Mail, 12 Sept 2010.

Samoan clerics finger homosexuals over global warming

The Register, 21 Sept 2010.

German throws puppy at Hells Angels bikers then flees on bulldozer

D.Telegraph, 17 June 2010.

Woman in sumo wrestler suit assaulted ex-girlfriend in gay pub after she waved at man dressed as Snickers bar

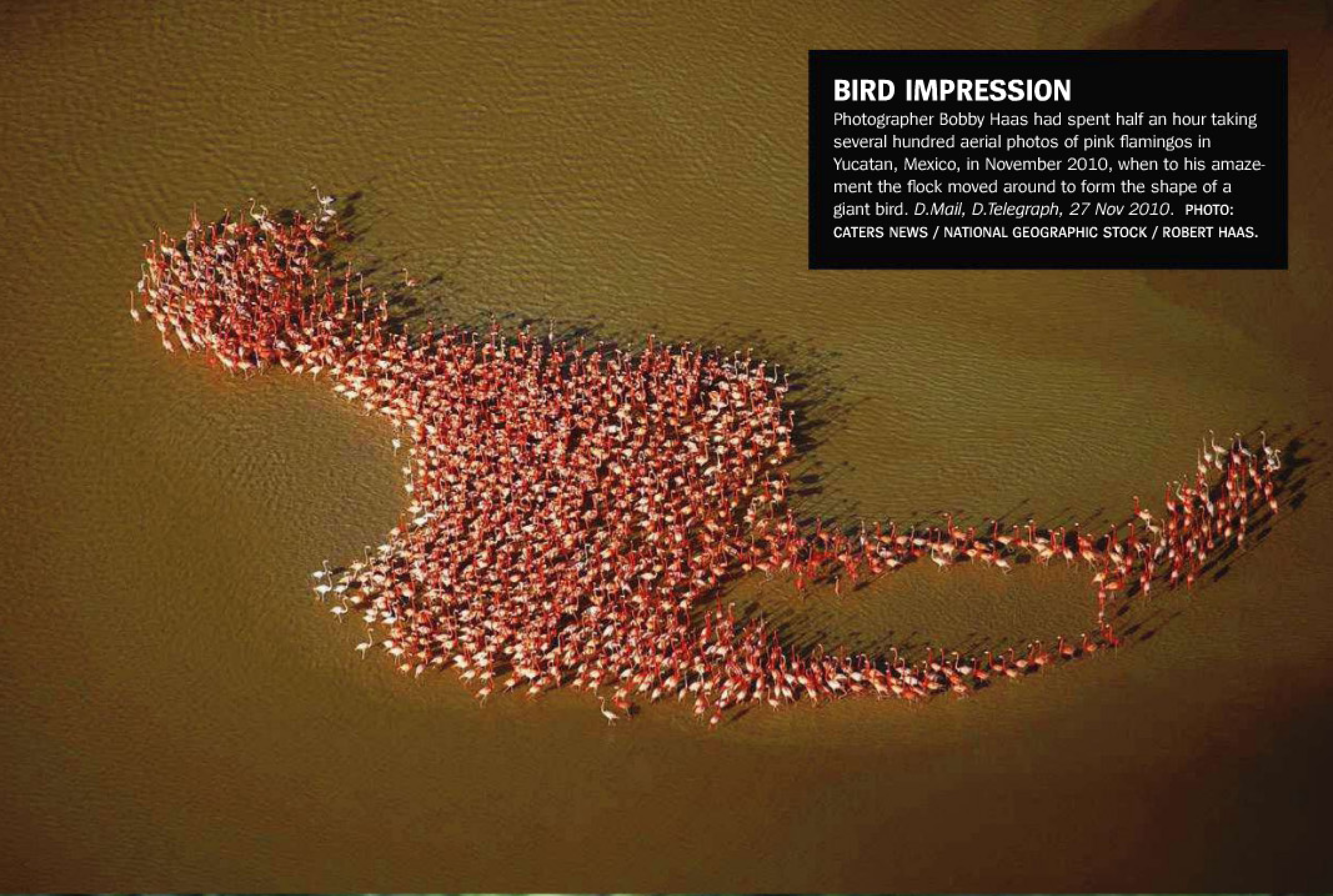
(Dublin) Eve. Herald, 23 June 2010.

Secret whale talks 'worrying'

Queensland times, 23 June 2010.

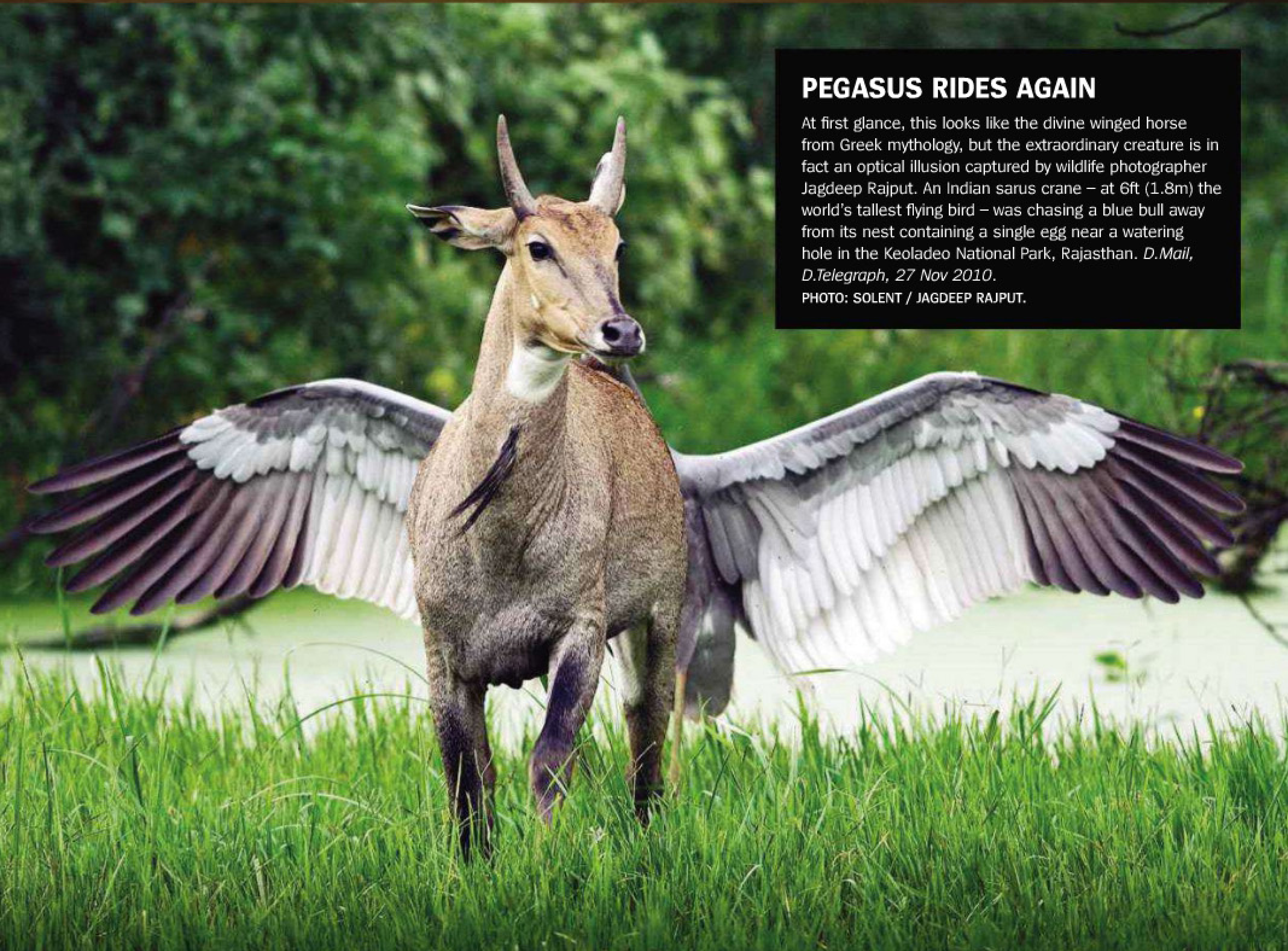
SHAMEFUL VASE EXIT FOR POOR LOBSTERS

Reigate Post, 21 Sept 2010.



BIRD IMPRESSION

Photographer Bobby Haas had spent half an hour taking several hundred aerial photos of pink flamingos in Yucatan, Mexico, in November 2010, when to his amazement the flock moved around to form the shape of a giant bird. *D.Mail, D.Telegraph, 27 Nov 2010*. **PHOTO: CATERS NEWS / NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC STOCK / ROBERT HAAS.**



PEGASUS RIDES AGAIN

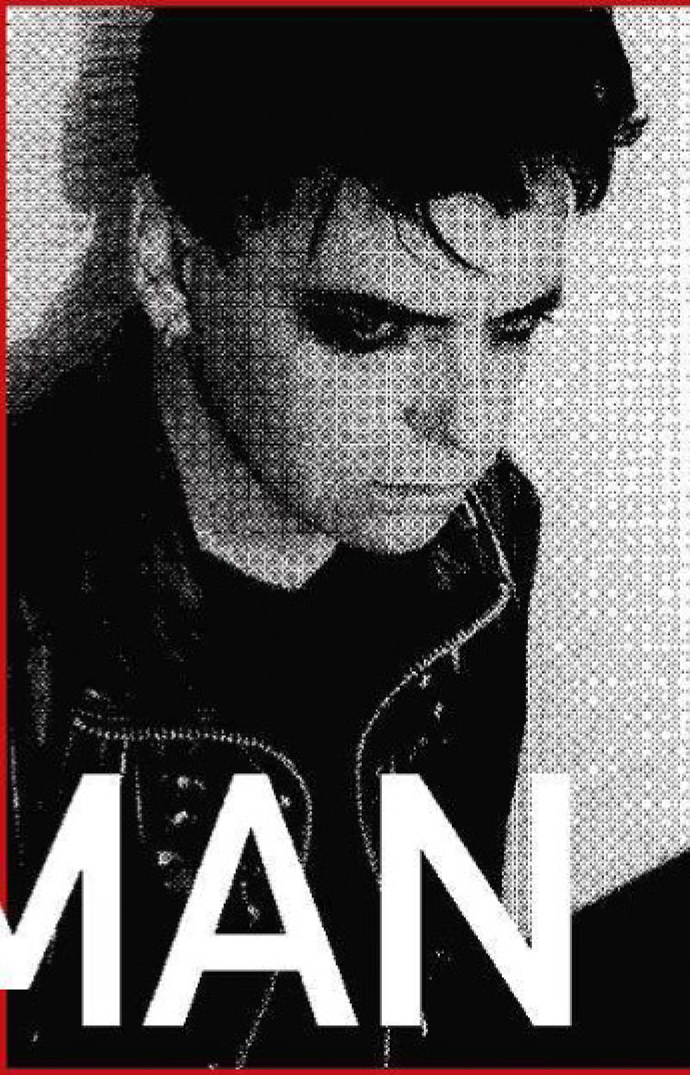
At first glance, this looks like the divine winged horse from Greek mythology, but the extraordinary creature is in fact an optical illusion captured by wildlife photographer Jagdeep Rajput. An Indian sarus crane – at 6ft (1.8m) the world's tallest flying bird – was chasing a blue bull away from its nest containing a single egg near a watering hole in the Keoladeo National Park, Rajasthan. *D.Mail, D.Telegraph, 27 Nov 2010*.

PHOTO: SOLENT / JAGDEEP RAJPUT.

DENNIS MUSIC AND BACK TO THE PHUTURE PROUDLY PRESENT

BACK TO THE PHUTURE

TOMORROW IS TODAY



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SIDELINES...

ASLEEP ON THE JOB

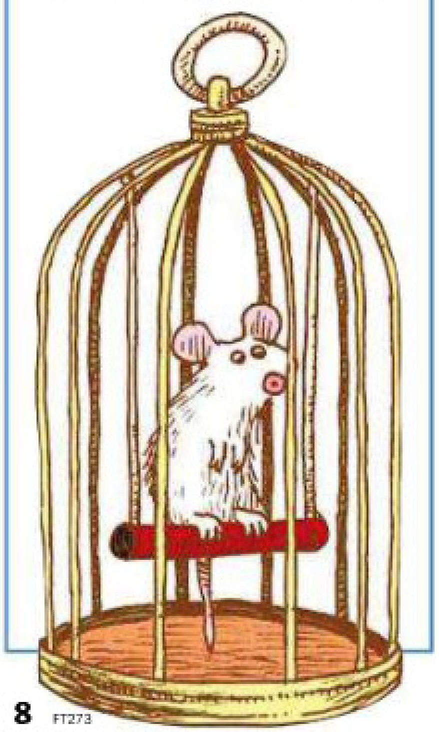
Jobseekers have ruined their chances of getting work by falling asleep, asking for a cigarette or keeping a crash helmet on during interviews. Others talked about their love life, criticised previous employers, or answered mobile phone calls in the middle of the interview. These *faux pas* emerged following a survey for the website CareerBuilder.co.uk. *D.Telegraph, Metro Herald (Dublin), 8 Sept 2010.*

THE FLASKS OF WAR

Ahn Sang-Soo, chairman of South Korea's ruling Grand National Party, was ridiculed after he posed with North Korean "artillery shells" that turned out to be charred thermos flasks. He held up the two cylindrical objects in a bombed-out house on the island of Yeonpyeong the day after it was attacked by the north. *D.Telegraph, 3 Dec 2010.*

SINGING MICE

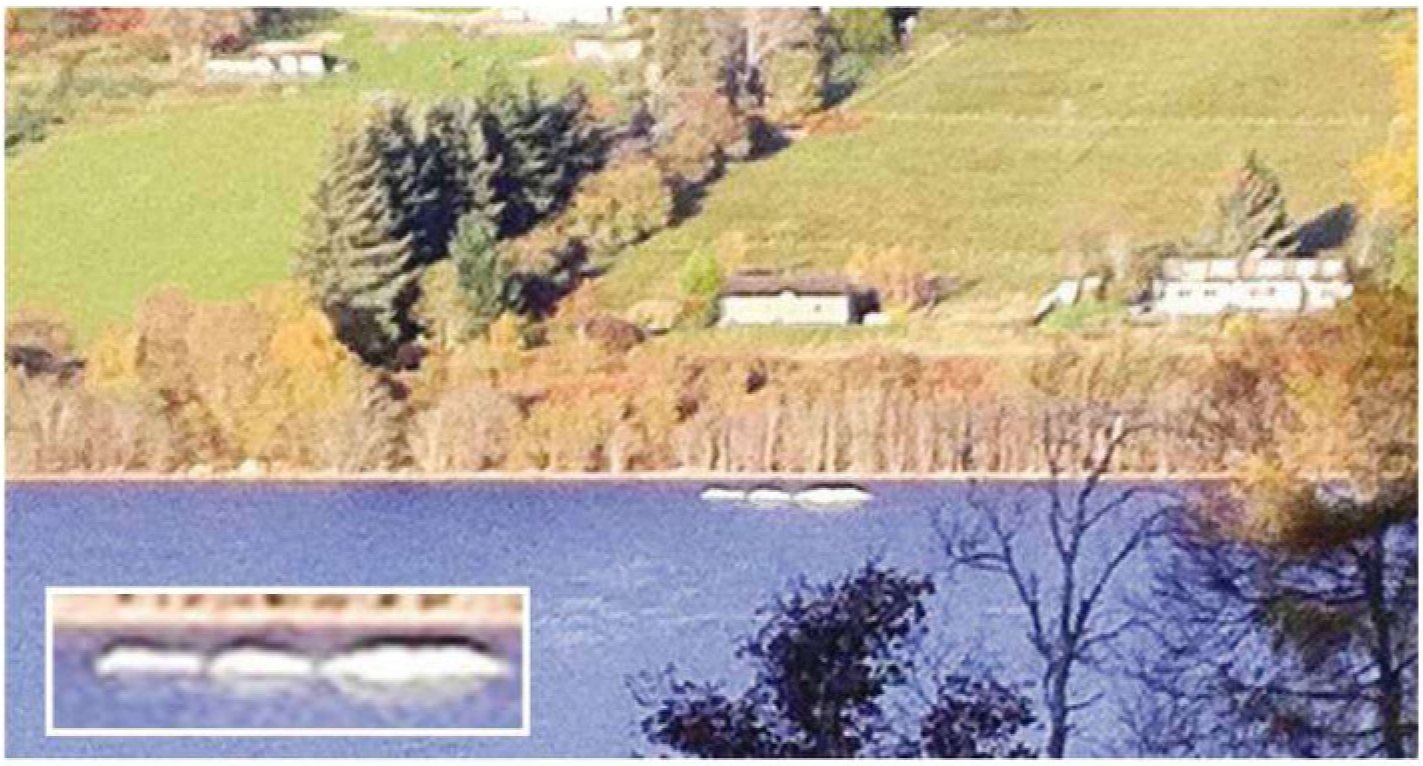
Scientists at the University of Osaka in Japan have created a mouse that sings like a bird. "We have crossbred genetically modified mice for generations to see what would happen," said Arikuni Uchimura, the lead researcher. He said the first chirping mouse was born by chance but now there are more than 100. The mutants may provide clues on how human language evolved. *Metro, 22 Dec 2010.*



MARTIN ROSS

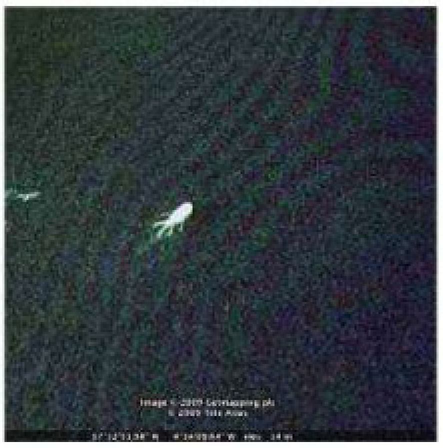
Camera-ready Nessie

New pictures emerge of a perennial monster favourite



© RICHARD PRESTON

ABOVE: Richard Preston spotted a classic Nessie appearance in November 2010. **BELOW:** Google Earth revealed this intriguing shape.



GOOGLE EARTH

FOUR-HUMP FEATURES

Landscape gardener Richard Preston, 27, was working on Aldourie Castle gardens on the banks of Loch Ness when he spotted a shape on the loch's surface out of the corner of his eye that he thought might be Nessie. He told STV news: "I was just walking through the castle gardens and I spotted something in the distance. When I looked closer, I could clearly see the four-hump features. I thought I'd take a picture of it, to see if there was anything in it, to see what others thought. I was surprised that it stayed there as long as it did. I took several shots of it before it suddenly disappeared. I literally just turned my back and it was gone." When asked whether or not he believed in the monster, he said: "Well, there's definitely something in the myth. There were no ripples in the water, no boats, nothing around. I have no idea what it was, but it undoubtedly looks like Nessie." *http://news.stv.tv, 26 Nov 2010.*

"GENUINE EVIDENCE"

Simon Dinsdale, a retired police detective from Essex, insists that the celebrated two-minute film recorded in 1960 by his father, the famous Nessie-hunter Tim Dinsdale (1924–87, obit **FT50:6–7**), is genuine. "I'm experienced at looking at evidence," he said, "and I can tell you that on the balance of probabilities there is something large and unknown living in this loch." What's more, he claims to have seen the monster with his own eyes on two occasions. "I saw this immense, extraordinary object," he said. "It looked like the back of a huge animal. It stood two or three feet [60–90cm] out of the water, four or five feet [1.2–1.5m] across, reddish brown and had a blotch on the left flank which I could see very clearly. And then it started to move – a most electrifying moment." *D.Telegraph, 13 Dec 2010.*

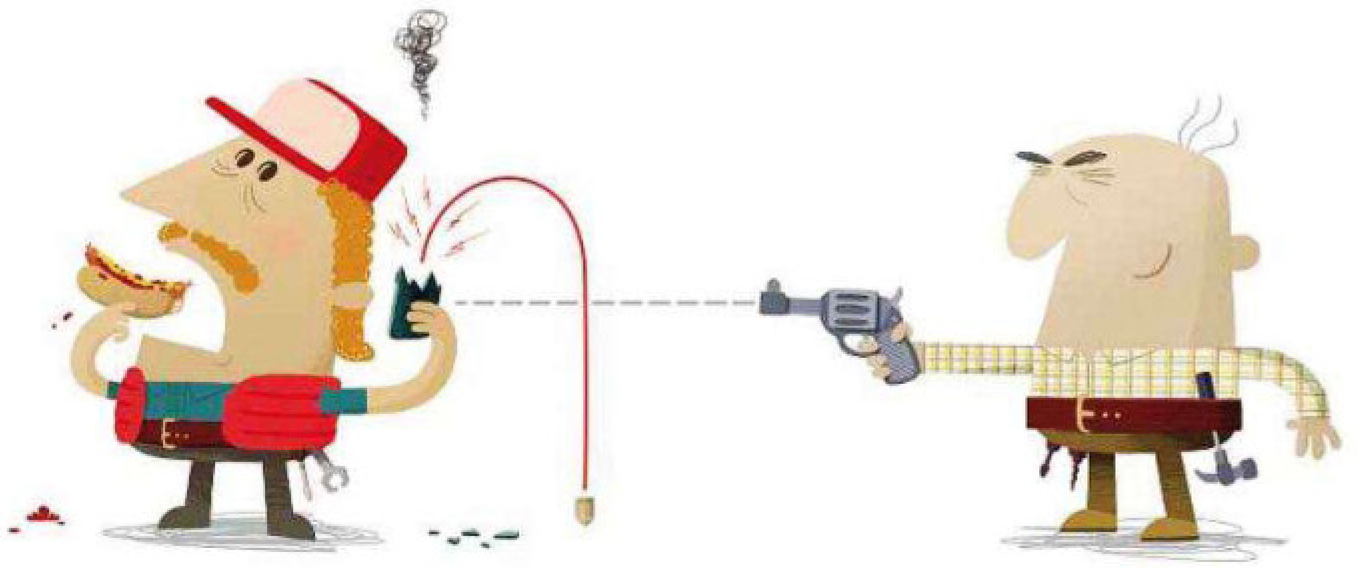
The object is 65ft long, with a body, a tail and four legs

NESSIE ON GOOGLE EARTH?

Jason Cooke spotted "Nessie" on Loch Ness, not far from Invermoriston, while browsing Google Earth's satellite mapping program. The shape, which can be seen by entering coordinates Latitude 57°12/52.13"N, Longitude 4°34'14.16"W, is about 65ft (23m) long and appears to have an oval 'body', a 'tail' and four 'legs' or 'flippers'. "I couldn't believe it," said Cooke, 25, a security guard from Nottingham. "It's just like the descriptions of Nessie." Veteran Loch Ness researcher Adrian Shine said: "This is really intriguing. It needs further study." Many dismiss it as a boat… but what about those 'flippers'? *Sun, 26 Aug 2009.*

SURVIVING BULLETS

THESE ARE THE ONES THAT APPARENTLY *DIDN'T* HAVE THEIR NUMBERS ON THEM...



DAVID NEEDHAM

A sneeze, cash, and women's underwear have all saved people's lives

Darco Sangermano, 28, a craftsman from Turin, spent New Year's Eve with his girlfriend in Naples. As the city sky exploded in a traditional celebration of fireworks, firecrackers, and the occasional high-spirited blast of firearms, they were wandering the streets when a stray .22 calibre bullet struck Mr Sangermano on the side of the head, behind his right eye. Bleeding heavily, he was rushed to hospital. Astonishingly, while he was waiting to be seen, he sneezed – and the bullet shot out of his right nostril. Doctors say it had been slowed down when it hit his skull – which almost certainly saved his sight, as well as his life. He said he had felt no pain, other than a splitting headache. Surgeons removed splinters of temporal bone that the bullet had left in its wake. At the time of the report, he was due to undergo laser surgery on his damaged retina, and was expected to make a full recovery. *telegraph.co.uk, 10 Jan; BBC News, Metro, 11 Jan 2011.*

A Russian millionaire survived a drive-by shooting in Berlin when the bullet got lodged in his bulging wallet. Christian Serin, 52, was with his son Marcel, 27, when a hitman fired twice at him. One bullet got stuck in the thick wad of euro in his breast pocket, while the other slammed into a wall. Five men were arrested after the property developer noted the car's number plate. *Sun, 14 May 2010.*

Money also saved Ivonete Pereira, shot in the chest by a stray bullet when two bandits tried to rob a bus in Salvador, the capital of the north-eastern Brazilian state of Bahia, on 11 April 2009. An armed off-duty policeman on the bus opened fire, and was shot dead in the ensuing gun battle. Mrs Pereira, 58, anxious about frequent bus attacks in the area, had stuffed 150 reals (£48) in 20-real and 10-real notes in the left side of her bra. The wad of cash was just thick enough to absorb most of the impact, and prevent the bullet reaching her heart, although she still had to be taken to hospital to have it removed. *[AFP] 15 April 2009.*

Another woman had a lucky escape 10 days later in Detroit when a burglar's bullet bounced off the metal underwire in her bra on 21 April. One of three intruders fired a shot when the unnamed 57-year-old woman looked out of her window and saw them raiding the house next door while her neighbour was away. The bullet smashed the window and hit her. She was taken to hospital, but released the same day. '[The underwire] did slow the bullet down," said a police spokesman. "She sustained injuries but they're not life-threatening." *BBC News, 23 April 2009.*

Lydia Carranza was working in a dentist's office in Beverly Hills, California, in July 2009 when Jaime Paredes ran in and opened fire. He aimed the weapon directly at her heart but one of her size D silicone breast implants took the force of the blow. The gunman had gone to the office looking for his wife, who also worked there. She was shot and killed in the attack. Mrs Carranza was sitting a few feet away when the gunman turned on her. "She's just one lucky woman," said surgeon Dr Ashkan Ghavami. "The bullet fragments were millimetres from her heart and her vital organs. Had she not had the implant, she might not be alive today." *telegraph.co.uk, 25 Feb 2010.*

Juan Camarena, 54, escaped with only a scratch last October when a Nexel cell phone in his jacket pocket stopped a bullet fired at him by an enraged building superintendent. Camarena had just started his new job as a handyman at 29 West 119th Street in Harlem, New York. The building's new superintendent had warned him that the former superintendent was angry about being fired and losing his apartment. *WABC, 8 Oct 2010.*

SIDELINES...

ARK HUNTER VANISHES

A man from Stornoway on Lewis, searching for remains of Noah's Ark on Mount Ararat, which rises to 17,820ft (5,346m) in eastern Turkey, was reported missing after failing to return from a solo expedition on the mountain. Donald Mackenzie, who is in his 40s, was part of a Christian group looking for the site (possibly) referred to in the biblical story. *BBC News, 8 Nov 2010.*

ALTERNATIVE HISTORY

A fifth of 2,000 children aged six to 12 polled in Britain think Buzz Lightyear was the first person to walk on the Moon; a third think Noel Edmonds invented the telephone; 11 per cent believe Albert Einstein was Frankenstein's brother; 10 per cent think Rolf Harris painted the Mona Lisa; and five per cent think Columbus invented liposuction. Or perhaps polls with multiple-choice questions aren't such a good idea, because people who don't know the answer simply take a guess; or some deliberately choose stupid answers as a prank. *D.Mail, MX News (Sydney), 8 Oct 2010.*

AN ANGRY GOD?

Bob Valet, 47, spent $500,000 fortifying his waterfront house in Sebastian, Florida, to withstand hurricanes – then it burnt down. *Sun, 22 Oct 2010.*

MASSIVE RESOURCE

Russia exports 60 tons of mammoth ivory to China every year, in a trade that could meet global demand for ethically sourced ivory. There might be as many as 150 million dead mammoths frozen beneath the Siberian tundra, made accessible as global warming melts the permafrost. *D.Telegraph, 27 Sept 2010.*

CONGRATULATIONS

Tara Wang and Austin DeCock announced their engagement in Detroit Lakes, Minnesota. The marriage was to take place in Moorhead, North Dakota, on 16 October. *(Fargo-Moorhead, ND) Forum, 19 Sept 2010.*

SIDELINES...

HACKNEY HOARD

Residents digging their garden in Hackney, east London, unearthed 80 American gold coins. The hoard of Double Eagle $20 coins, each weighing 33g (1.1oz) and dating from 1854 to 1913, could be worth a six-figure sum. Who buried them and why is an intriguing mystery. *(London) Eve. Standard, 18 Oct 2010.*

CHEEKY MONKEYS!

Last August, Japanese officials were hunting a band of monkeys that had attacked more than 60 people in the foothills of Mount Fuji. Animal experts said they might be attacking people for fun, and that the attacks should end once they became bored. *D.Telegraph, 2 Sept 2010.*

NO OFFENCE INTENDED

Disabled driver Harold Cadwallader was given a £40 parking ticket after the sun bleached the print off his blue badge. Wardens said they couldn't be sure it was valid. "I rang the council," said Harold, 87, of Woodbridge, Suffolk, "but they advised me to put my badge where the sun doesn't shine." *Metro, 12 Nov 2009.*

JINXED TRAM

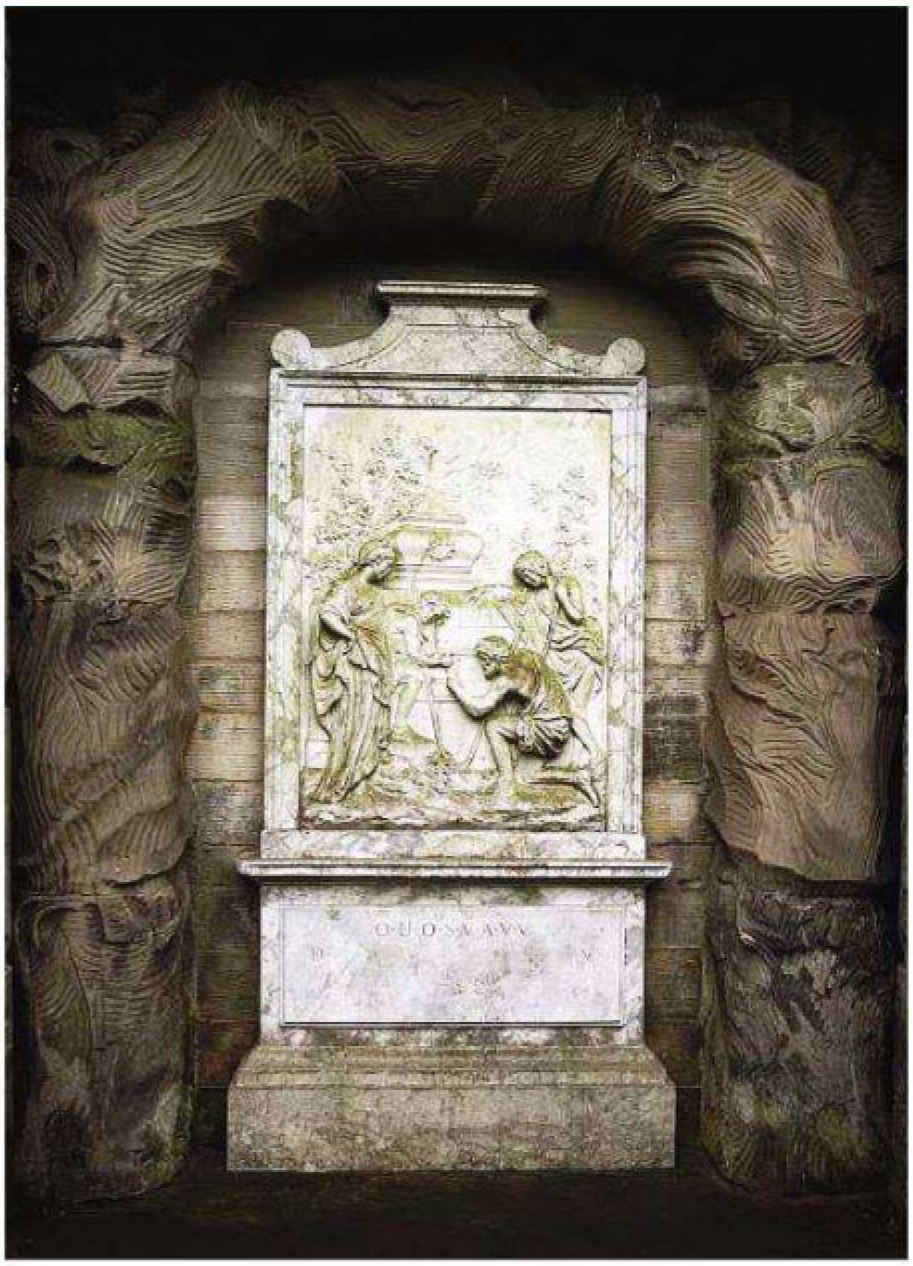
On 31 October 1954, Zagreb's tram number 13 jumped the tracks at 50mph (80km/h), rolled four times and slammed into a pole, killing 19. The route number was abolished, but was revived in 1996. Within a year, it became the tram with the greatest number of accidents. Then on 27 May 2008, 13 people were hurt in another tram 13 crash. The latest prang was on 24 September 2010, when tram 3 hit a stationery tram 13, injuring several people. *Croatian Times, 1 Oct 2010.*

ODD LUGGAGE

A briefcase seized at Gatwick airport last August was full of dead and plucked pigeons and an old pair of boots. *Shropshire Star, 3 Sept 2010.*

FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

FURTHER DETAILS ON STORIES PREVIOUSLY REPORTED IN *FT*



GETTY IMAGES

MONUMENT CODE EXPLAINED (AGAIN) [FT193:4–5, 195:8]

ForteanTimes
THE DA VINCI CODE

The inscription on the Shepherd's Monument in the grounds of Shugborough Hall in Staffordshire, commissioned by Thomas Anson, Earl of Lichfield, around 1748, has long been puzzled over. Both Dickens and Darwin tried in vain to crack the code. The monument features a reverse image of Poussin's *Les Bergier d'Arcadie II*, with one figure pointing to the inscription *Et in Arcadia Ego* (variously translated as "I too am in Paradise" or "And I [Death] am even in Paradise"). Below the picture are the letters D OUOSVAVV M, with the first and last letters lower than the rest. Some commentators, influenced by the freeform speculation surrounding the Rennes-le-Château mystery and the Oak Island money pit, have suggested these letters are a coded message left by the Knights Templar, the Priory of Sion, the Lizard People (or whoever) pointing to where the Holy Grail is buried. Other suggestions – among many others – include a coded love letter, or the initial letters of the first words of a poem by Anna Seward, "The Swan of Lichfield": "Out of your own sweet vale, Alicia, vanish vanity 'twixt Deity and Man". (U is substituted for Y, which doesn't occur in Latin script). The problem here is that Seward was only a year old when the monument was commissioned. It's more likely that DM stands for *Dis Manibus* ("To the Gods of the Underworld, hail!"), the standard classical Roman gravestone prefix.

Now the historian AJ Morton offers a new explanation. "There doesn't appear to be any reference to the curious letters until the 19th century," he said. "This suggests, quite strongly, that they were added later." One resident of Shugborough was George Adams, Thomas Anson's nephew, who married Mary Vernon-Venables, the daughter of the first Baron Vernon and sister of Edward Vernon-Harcourt, Archbishop of York. Their son, another Thomas Anson, was made Viscount Anson of Shugborough in 1806. Mr Morton said: "It is very likely that Mary Vernon-Venables of Sudbury Hall, the Baron Vernon of Derbyshire, the honourable Edward Vernon-Harcourt and the first Viscount Anson of Orgreave (a hamlet united with Overley) and Shugborough were somehow involved in the creation of the original 'Shugborough Code'." This solution seems rather tenuous and is unlikely to end the speculation. *D.Telegraph, 1 Feb 2011.*

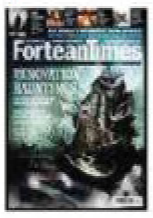
PURLOINED PENIS PANIC [FT238:16]

ForteanTimes
GOLEM

Alex Ikege, a 48-year-old Nigerian, was arrested in Tamale, the capital of northern Ghana, last December on charges of indecent assault. He was accused of stealing the genitalia of four men: Mohammed Assan, Abubakari Zaidu, Ahmed Lukman and Sadat Tahiru, all residents of Damongo in the West Gonja District. According to the report on the Ghanaian website peacefmonline.com (22 Dec 2010): "Earlier reports suggested that the suspect allegedly siphoned off the genitals of the four, but police disclosed that their genitals were intact except that they seemed to have mysteriously shrunk and could no longer erect." Ikege was due to appear in court on 23 December.

Ghana, like many West African countries, has regular penis theft panics. In 1997, for instance, angry mobs beat 12 suspected penis-snatchers to death; and sometime in 2009, a middle-aged man was nearly lynched in Accra after a mob descended on him after a young man had allegedly lost his wedding tackle. For previous penis panics, see **FT56:33, 82:30, 87:45, 93:10, 99:12, 103:12, 105:20, 126:66, 148:23, 156:10, 211:16–17**.

FLOATING FEET UPDATE [FT268:22]



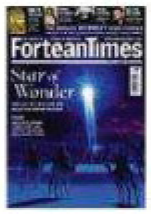
The severed right foot found on a beach in Cleethorpes, Lincolnshire, on 11 August has been identified as belonging to Jason Morley, 28, an IT worker from Lincolnshire reported missing from South Yorkshire in December 2008. His car was later found abandoned near the Humber Bridge. His left foot was found on a beach at Terschelling in the Netherlands on 11 September, a month after his right foot. Both were in training shoes. In a bizarre coincidence, the foot found in the Humber estuary near the Humber Bridge on 4 September has been identified as belonging to another man from Lincolnshire.

On 5 December, a right foot in a boy's size 6 hiking boot was found on the shoreline of Tacoma in Washington State. It was the 10th severed foot to be found washed ashore in the Pacific Northwest since August 2007. Tacoma police said it probably belonged to a youth or small adult, and the 'OzArk Trail' boot brand was sold in Wal-Mart stores from 2004 to 2005. It might have floated from the Puyallup River or Puget Sound. *Metro, 1 Oct; Tacoma (WA) News, Victoria (BC) Times-Colonist, 16 Dec 2010.*

CHESS CHIEF TRIUMPHS [FT268:23]

On 29 September 2010, ex-President Kirsan Ilyumzhinov of Kalmykia was re-elected President of FIDE, the World Chess Federation, a post he has held since 1995. He beat the former world chess champion, Anatoly Karpov, 58, his only challenger, by 95 votes to 55, after a bitter campaign that critics said descended into intimidation and farce. Karpov questioned the sanity of the 48-year-old eccentric millionaire, who believes he has ridden on an alien spaceship and thinks that chess was brought to Earth by aliens. He also claims to use hypnosis in daily communication and consults clairvoyants in his business affairs. *Independent, D.Telegraph, 30 Sept 2010.*

BOGUS SOCIAL WORKERS [FT270:10–11]



After a dearth of bogus social worker (BSW) reports in 2008 and 2009, the August incident in Hampshire was followed by one in South Wales in December. Louise Jones, 28, from Caerau, near Maesteg, was left disgusted and frightened after a visit by one of these mystifying strangers. She was already nervous about sleeping at home alone as her husband Michael worked nights, but her fears were exacerbated by the incident.

She first saw the BSW on 29 November, acting suspiciously near her house. "I was outside the house and this woman was parked opposite," she said. "She got out of the car and was walking up the street looking at the house numbers. She came back down and got into the car, turned it around and parked outside my house." She thought no more about it until the woman returned four days later and knocked on her door. "She said her name was Alison and that she was from social services. She said she had been told that they had information I was leaving the baby [her four-month-old son Jacob] in the house on his own and I said 'No, I don't think so'."

Ms Jones invited the woman in and she asked to see the baby, who was in bed. "I brought Jacob down… she told me she needed to check him over, so she took off his pyjama top and bottoms and his vest." The woman said she would return the following week, but couldn't say when. It was only when a genuine health visitor turned up later that day and said she knew nothing about any visit by a social worker that Ms Jones realised that "Alison" was an impostor.

Bridgend police were investigating. "The resident didn't ask to see any identification," said Sergeant Joy Howells. "However, she saw what appeared to be some form of identification around her neck, although she didn't see what was on it." The woman was described as white and of slim build, in her early 30s and about 5ft 4in (1.63m) tall. She was wearing black trousers, a white top and black cardigan, and had metal-framed glasses and a gold wedding ring with diamonds across it. She was carrying a black clipboard and was seen driving a dark Ford Ka. *South Wales Echo, Glamorgan Gazette, 16 Dec 2010.*

TEENAGERS ADRIFT [FT271:8]

The three youths from Toketau rescued near Fiji on 24 November after 50 days adrift in the Pacific have denied the rumour current within their Atafu community that they were love-struck teenagers following their hearts across the ocean. "Nah, man, there was no girl, we just wanted more vodka," said 14-year-old Etueni Nasau. In the early hours of 5 October they nicked a bottle of vodka – known as "hot stuff" on Tokelau – from Filo Filo's father, Tamu. Out of sight of the village, they finished the bottle and decided they would find more on the neighbouring atoll of Nukunonu. After taking an 11ft (3.5m) aluminium boat from Samuelu Pelesa's uncle, they set off. "We were just drunk," said Etueni. "We had heaps of petrol but we went the wrong way." The petrol ran out after about three days. *(Queensland) Courier-Mail, (Sydney) D.Telegraph, 2 Dec 2010.*

SIDELINES…

OH MISSUS!

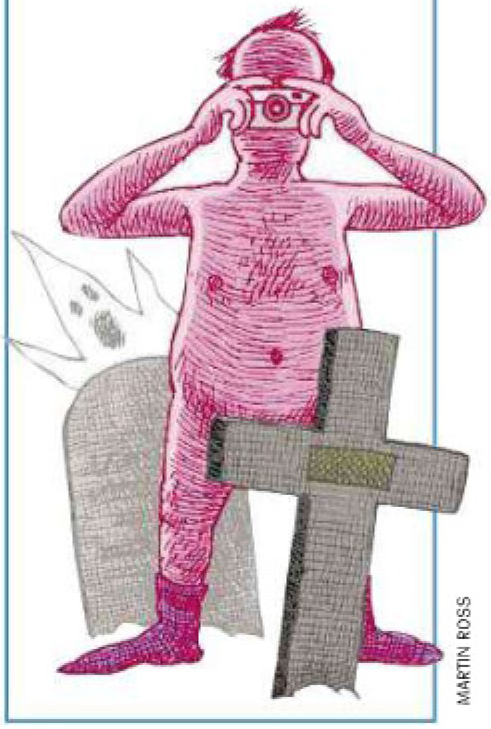
Research by the findmypast.co.uk website has uncovered more than 50 women who became Mary Christmas on marrying, the first being Mary Cannon who married in Alton, Hampshire, in 1837. Other married women included Holly Oakes, Eileen Dover, Hazel Nut, Mona Lott, Jean Pool, Joy Rider, Lily Pond, Anita Bath, Candy Barr and Kerry Oakey. *[PA] 5 Dec 2010.*

FISH ATTACK

Karri Larson, 46, was bitten in the chest by a large fish that leapt into her kayak near Big Pine Key in Florida on 17 October. She suffered a punctured lung and broken ribs and was flown to hospital in Miami. The Coastguard blamed the injury on a barracuda, but the Wildlife Conservation Commission disagreed. Some experts suggested it was a houndfish. *[AP] South Florida Sun-Sentinel, 18 Oct 2010.*

GRAVE OFFENCE

Police in Picayune, Mississippi, set up a motion-activated camera in a local cemetery to catch vandals but instead caught a naked ghost-hunter. Robert Hurst, 47, said naked skin was the "best canvas" for showing the orbs of energy from the spirit world which he hoped to photograph. He said he had only intended to remove his shirt, but got carried away. He faced a charge of indecent exposure. *[AP] 13 Dec 2010.*



MARTIN ROSS

SIDELINES...

DEATH REHEARSAL

To teach them "the value of life", students at Rende Medical Collage in Taiwan are obliged to write a will, dress in a shroud, lie in a coffin and be buried under floorboards for 10 minutes. *MX News (Sydney), 13 Dec 2010.*

ARMADA AND CHIPS

A survey of 2,000 British secondary schoolchildren showed that one in 20 believe the Spanish Armada is a tapas dish and one in six think Walter Raleigh invented the bicycle. A significant proportion think that Captain James Cook was at the helm of Starship *Enterprise*, Christopher Columbus discovered gravity, and the Battle of Waterloo was fought at the London rail terminal. Or at least those were the options selected in the survey. *D.Telegraph, 21 Oct 2010.*

BEASTLY VANDALS

When seven cars had their ABS brake cables cut or damaged and several houses had their phone cables severed in north Swindon, Wiltshire, police launched an urgent investigation to catch the vandals – but called it off when forensic tests showed that squirrels were responsible. Similar sabotage has been caused by fox cubs on cars in Kent and south London; it is thought they enjoy the slightly sweet flavour of brake fluid. *D.Telegraph, 16 Oct, 11 Dec 2010.*

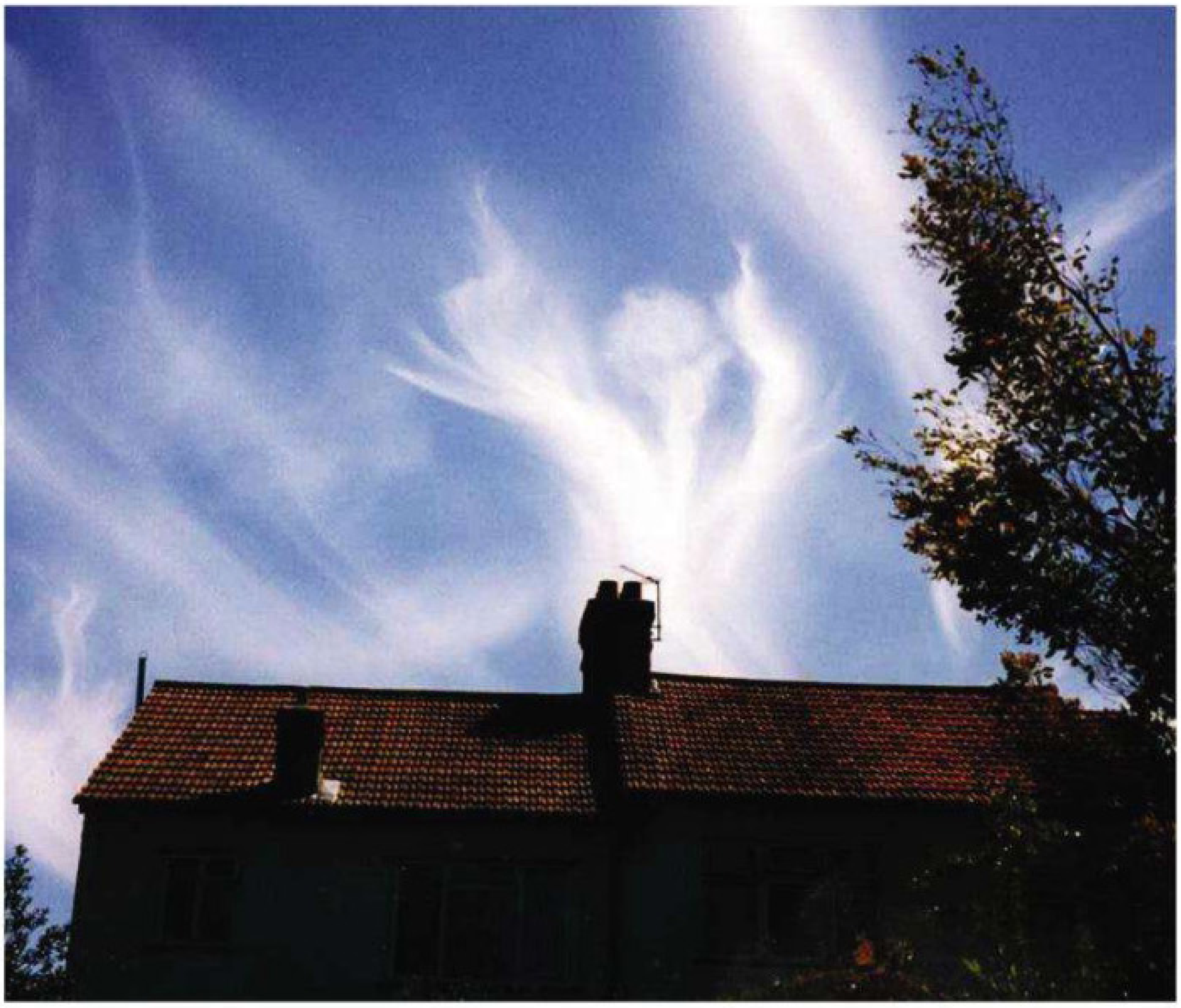
PORKY PUZZLE

A mysterious circle of 70 model pigs was baffling motorists on the M40 in December. The life-size porkers were arranged snout-to-tail in a perfect 60ft (18m)-diameter circle in a field next to the motorway in Warwickshire. *Metro, 10 Dec 2010.*

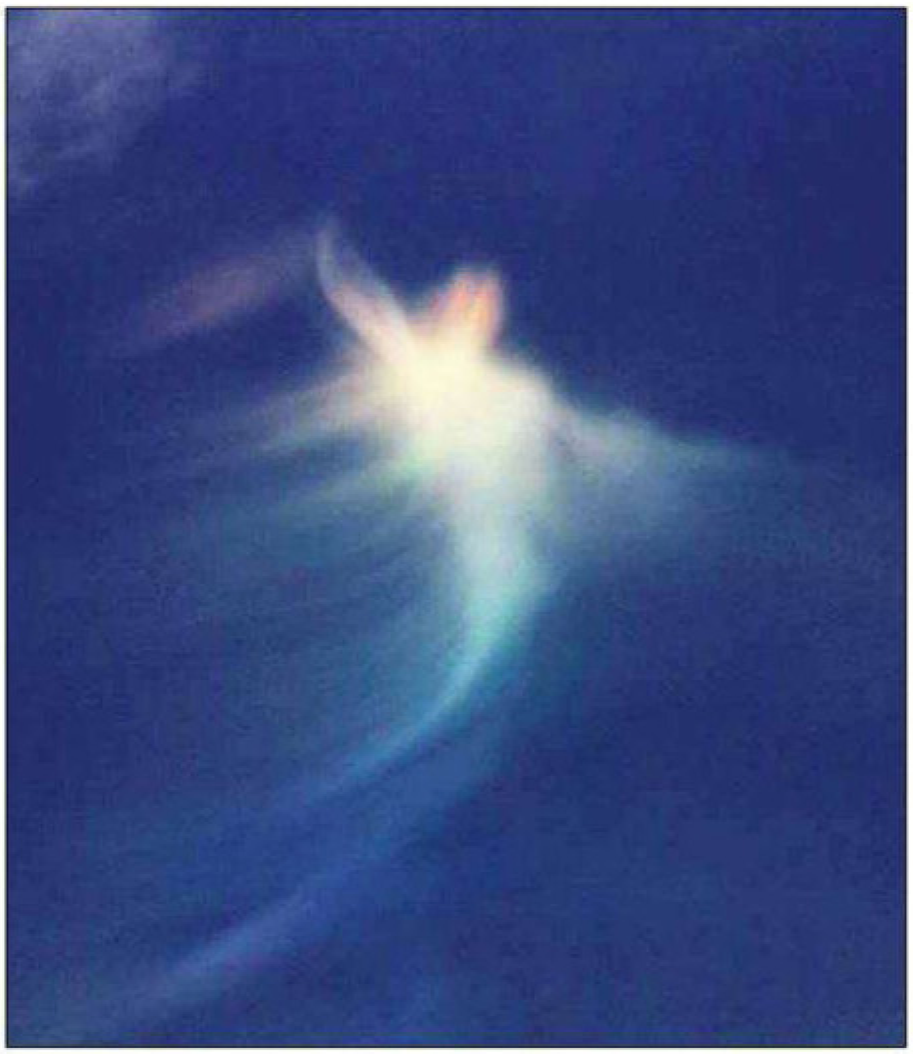
GOAT AID

A drunken motorist stopped by police in Poland was found to be driving his goat to a date. The driver claimed his male pet, which was in the front passenger seat, was lonely and he was taking it to visit a female goat in Kertzyn. *Metro, 7 Jan 2011.*

CLOUDY WITH A CHANCE OF ANGELS



CHRISTINE SNOWDEN



BARCROFT MEDIA / CJ HOLDING

This strange cloud (above) was photographed by legal secretary Christine Snowdon, 61, above her roof in Carshalton Beeches, Surrey. She interpreted it as an angel, but then she had been seeing angels since she was four, according to the *Daily Mail* (21 Aug 2010). On the same day, the *Sun* compared the cloud to Edvard Munch's painting *The Scream*, saying: "The spooky likeness is enough to give you an art attack". It's all in the eye of the beholder...

CJ Holding, 32, a photographer from Henley in Oxfordshire, captured this image of a cloud in the shape of an angel in Somerset. "The picture was taken during a despairing moment in my life nearly seven years go, she said. "I looked up and saw the most amazing sight of my life." It inspired her to set up the Angel Trust, a charity that funds art workshops for people with learning difficulties and disabilities. *Times, D.Telegraph, 1 Jan 2011.*

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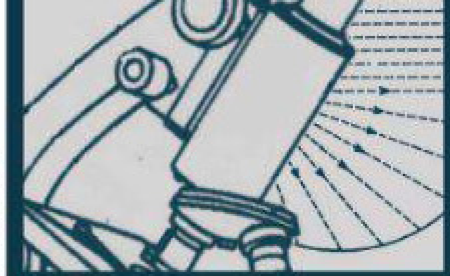

MATT PATTINSON

THE FLUORIDATION MENACE

Contamination of the water supply is a threat that could cause havoc in the form of disease and panic, but, asks **DAVID HAMBLING**, is fluoride really a danger or a blessing?

A recent battle in the High Court was the latest in a war you might have thought ended decades ago. But when it comes to the contentious topic of water fluoridation, there are some determined fighters, armed with sheaves of scientific data. Is there really a concealed health threat? And what does it have to do with mind control?

This latest action was carried out by Southampton resident Geraldine Milner, who is making a legal challenge to the South Central Strategic Health Authority's (SCSHA) decision to fluoridate her water.[1] She is not the only one who objects: when Southern Water held a public consultation on the issue, 72 per cent of the respondents were opposed. Another poll commissioned by the SCSHA found 38 per cent opposed to fluoridation and 32 per cent in favour. In spite of these results, the SCSHA instructed Southern Water to go ahead and fluoridate.

It's no wonder there is so much opposition: type 'fluoridation' into a search engine and you'll get an avalanche of negative material, such as fluoridation.com, which asserts that fluoride poisoning causes cancer, brain damage and skeletal malformation.

The history of fluoridation starts in 1945, when one part per million of fluoride was introduced into the water supply of Grand Rapids in Michigan.[2] Researchers had discovered that in some regions the residents enjoyed a lower rate of tooth decay, and that this was related to fluoride in the drinking water. During the 15-year study, the rate of tooth decay among Grand Rapids's children dropped by 60 per cent, and this effect has been confirmed in many subsequent studies. The US Center for Disease Control and Prevention puts fluoridation of drinking water among the top 10 public health achievements of the 20th century and estimates that every dollar spent on it saves $38 in treatment costs, not to mention preventing untold dental suffering.

GETTY IMAGES / HULTON ARCHIVE / KEYSTONE FEATURES / CHRIS WARE

ABOVE: An employee of the Watford Water Board adds fluroride to the water supply in March 1965 to fight tooth decay in the general population.

On the other hand, there are those who argue that fluoride is poisonous – and with good reason. Hydrofluorosilic acid, the chemical used for fluoridation in the UK, is listed as a Part II poison under the Poisons Act 1972. In his book *The Fluoride Deception*,[3] investigative journalist Christopher Bryson suggests that during the Cold War the harmful effects of fluoride were deliberately suppressed. Fluorides were vital in the nuclear and aerospace manufacturing industries, and any possible legal challenge to them on health grounds was a threat to national security.

Fluoride's toxicity was demonstrated in 1993 when dozens of Mississippi residents suffered an acute gastrointestinal illness that was traced to fluoride poisoning;[4] and in some parts of the world, such as Africa's Rift Valley, a condition known as fluorosis is endemic.[5] This affects the bones and joints, with symptoms ranging from pain and stiffness to a crippling bone-melting condition in which vertebræ fuse together and movement becomes impossible.

In fluorosis, the vertebræ can fuse together so that movement is impossible

Fluoride is a poison, but then so are many other things. As any toxicologist will tell you, it's all a matter of dose. In the Mississippi case, a problem at a water treatment plant produced a concentration of fluoride that was up to 200 times higher than it should have been. In Africa, fluorosis is the result of prolonged exposure to water with a natural fluoride concentration of 40 parts per million or more. Whether concentrations of less than eight parts per million can cause health problems is contentious: the establishment view is that below this level is safe.

A meta-analysis combining the results of many research papers was recently carried out by the *British Medical Journal*. This looked for connections between fluoridation and medical conditions including bone problems, cancer, Down's syndrome, mortality, senile dementia, goitre, and low IQ.[6] Overall, there was no clear evidence of negative effects. The one problem that was identified, ironically enough, was tooth damage by fluoride (dental fluorosis), generally confined to white flecks or spots on the teeth.

The most sinister aspect of fluoridation is the alleged mental effect. Online you will find claims that it damages the brain, destroying individuals' power to resist authority and makes them easy to dominate – and was used in both Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia to suppress resistance.[7] Unfortunately, the sources cited (such as Joseph Borkin's book *The Crimes and Punishment of I.G. Farben* on the German chemical company) don't actually mention fluoridation.

Such claims have a long pedigree. In the US, fluoridation was seen as a form of totalitarian, "socialised" medicine being forced down people's throats – making it an obvious Communist plot. Anti-Red campaigner Kenneth Goff testified before the House Un-American Activities Committee that Communists planned to use fluoride to "keep the general public docile during a steady encroachment of Communism". In fact, the documents he provided only showed that the Soviets believed that fluoridation was a good thing... though perhaps that was enough to condemn it in his eyes.

In Stanley Kubrick's *Dr Strangelove*, General Jack D Ripper memorably goes off the rails while warning of Communist contamination of "the purity of our precious bodily fluids". Not everyone who follows this path is a conspiracy theorist, but the message is clear: if you're going to go medicating the water supply, you need a very good public relation campaign. Because the fluoride itself is certainly not reducing people's ability to resist.

NOTES

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2 http://bit.ly/fSmJEu (nidcr.nih.gov).

3 Christopher Bryson: *The Fluoride Deception*, Seven Stones Press, 2004.

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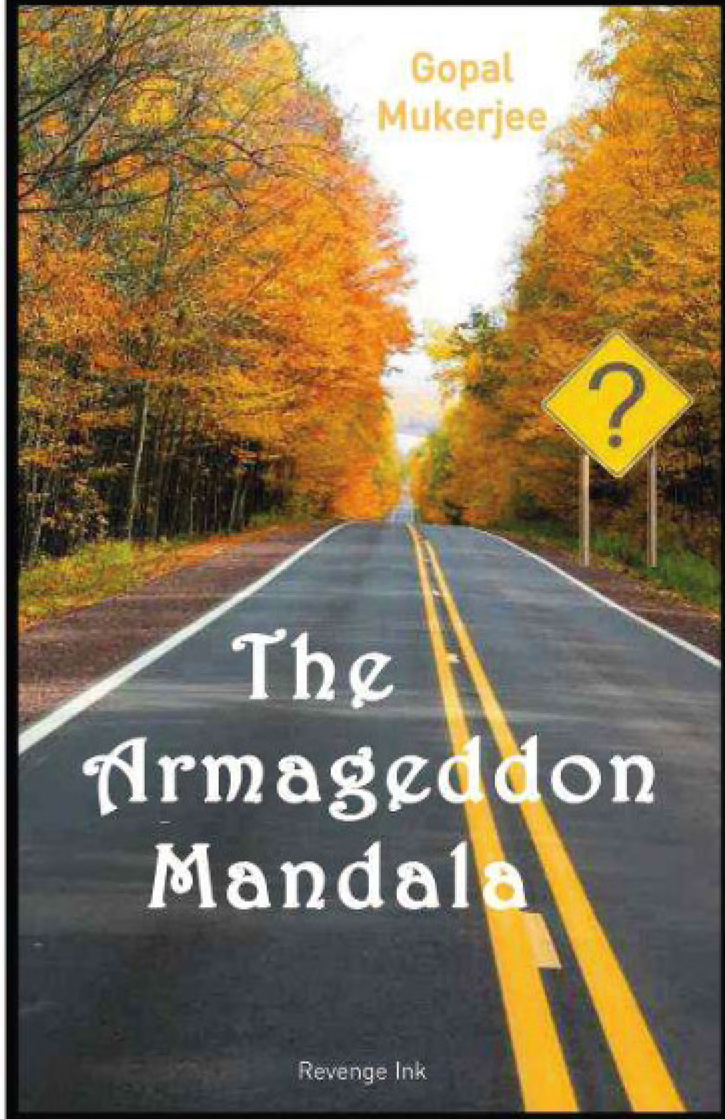

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MATT PATTINSON

GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE asks a policeman about spectral car crashes and ghosts on the road.

GETTY IMAGES /HULTON ARCHIVE

A 'PARANORMAL CAR CRASH'

Just after Christmas 2010, my attention was drawn to the story of the "M6 Paranormal Car Crash" circulating on the Internet. It originated from a series of bulletins issued between January and November 2010, via a free Press Release service, concerning anomalies arising from a motorway pile-up of 17 vehicles on the M6 near Birmingham. Subsequent analysis of CCTV footage showed three of the vehicles to be without occupants, and a strange light appearing in the road. No bodies or human remains were found in the three vehicles, and it was suggested that the authorities were avoiding making any public statement in an attempt to quash the story.

This tale of disappearing drivers grew progressively more elaborate, in increasingly wild follow-up bulletins posted through the year, linking it with another bizarre traffic accident in Paris and ghoulish goings-on in a French morgue. Back in England, a mysterious "Detective Silverton" provided the author with a personal briefing on the case, at an unidentified building near Manchester resembling "an old nuclear bunker". The last instalments mentioned a strange suspect in custody, anomalous results from blood tests and hints of an enigmatic code.

Sadly lacking is any verifiable detail or corroboration, any trace of the CCTV footage or even the dates of the alleged accidents. The lack of any clear detail pushes the story into the territory of modern folklore or (more likely) fiction, in the form of a blog by someone with nothing better to do. However, if the aim was to hoax web-based paranormal groups, some degree of success can be claimed, given the number of websites uncritically repeating the claims and encouraging apparently serious discussion and comments upon elements of the tale. *Sources: PR Log Press Releases 4 Jan–10 Nov 2010; http://bit.ly/dJ5W7F (paranormaldailynews.com), and many others.*

> **A man rang police claiming he'd seen the ghosts of "two old ladies in a white Fiesta"**

Certainly, the lore of phantom cars regularly features apparitional vehicles without drivers (see Paul Devereux: *Haunted Land*, 2000) but not actual physical vehicles without occupants. Ghost tales circulating after a notorious road crash are not without precedent – the Blue Bell Hill haunting in Kent being the best known. Even a story that a crash *might* have happened could be enough to generate a ghost story. In "The Folklore of the Motor Car" (*Folklore* vol.80, winter 1969), Stewart Sanderson related a then current story that a fatal crash had occurred between a mini car and a lorry in 1966 on Sturminster bridge in Dorset. Two years later, a schoolboy cycling across the bridge supposedly rode into the ghosts of the three crash victims standing at the site of the accident.

POLICE REACTIONS TO GHOST AND UFO REPORTS

In practice, rather than organising cover-ups of reports of ghosts or aliens, police are more likely to find excuses to avoid involvement, diverting calls or enquiries to other agencies. A more sober picture of police reactions to anomalous reports emerges from the results of a Freedom of Information Act request made to the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary, published in the *Daily Telegraph* in September 2010. The FOI Act response showed that there had been over 150 emergency calls made to police by people claiming to have seen ghosts or UFOs in the previous 15 years. A spokesman for Devon and Cornwall Police said most of the incidents were logged as "non attendance", or "routine", although in some cases officers were forced to respond.

Worried calls came from people who spotted ghosts or poltergeists on CCTV cameras, including a call in October 2003 from an optimistic man wanting to make his fortune from what he believed was footage of a phantom. The police log of the 999 call laconically states: "Caller states he has got a ghost on CCTV. Caller wanted advice on who he could contact as the footage was going to make him a million. Advised to go to the press."

In July 2004, a man rang police claiming to have seen the ghosts of "two old ladies in a white Fiesta" on the dual carriageway of the A38B, near Newton Abbot, Devon. The police log recorded: "Two old ladies in white Fiesta – came onto the A38B carriageway on the off slip facing the wrong way. Stopped on the hard shoulder, trying to reverse back up the off slip." Pairs of ghosts are unusual; and as noted, phantom cars are usually characterised by an absence of drivers and passengers.

Having worked as a legal adviser for the Automobile Association in the south-east and south-west of England in 1988–89, I concluded that a percentage of motorists might well be declared clinically and even legally insane (although none was reporting ghosts or UFOs). If not a hoax, the insanity category might have applied to the man who called police claiming that the spectre of actor Paul Newman had given him a "horrible hairstyle and some dodgy photos"; similarly with a man who claimed his wife and dog were being abducted "by Martians" (the precise identification of the planetary origin of the abductors is itself a cause for doubting this report!).

However, it should at least be noted that claims of ghosts along the A38 are nothing new, and it is not the first time that police in the West Country have issued statements in connection with sightings on the road. Folklore avers that a hill on the road near the Barrow Reservoirs, four miles (6km) from Bristol, is haunted by "The Lady of Barrow", whose appearance 45 years ago made national news.

In November 1966, the *People* reported that 54-year-old Mr Jack Thomas, an engineer and a member of the St John Ambulance, described as a man who "has seen death at close quarters too often", was convinced that he had collided with a woman's ghost. He was travelling pillion on a motorbike driven by his 27-year-old son John, a motorcycle rally driver. Around midnight, they were coming down the hill near the Barrow Reservoirs when Mr Thomas senior saw a woman standing in the road.

"I tapped my son on the shoulder to make sure he had seen her because we were moving fast and he nodded… He switched on his extra-powerful rally light, and we saw her clearly. He began to throttle down and then, as we neared her, she stepped right into our path and we went through her." Father and son immediately stopped and searched the spot, striking matches in a vain attempt to locate the woman. Later, Mr Thomas learned of the legend of the Lady of Barrow, although some Bristol spiritualists claimed that it was the spirit of a woman killed in a motorbike crash. On being contacted by the press, Somerset police stated that there was a higher than average number of accidents at the spot but denied knowledge of any ghost. *D.Telegraph, 4 Sept 2010; The People, 20 Nov 1966.*

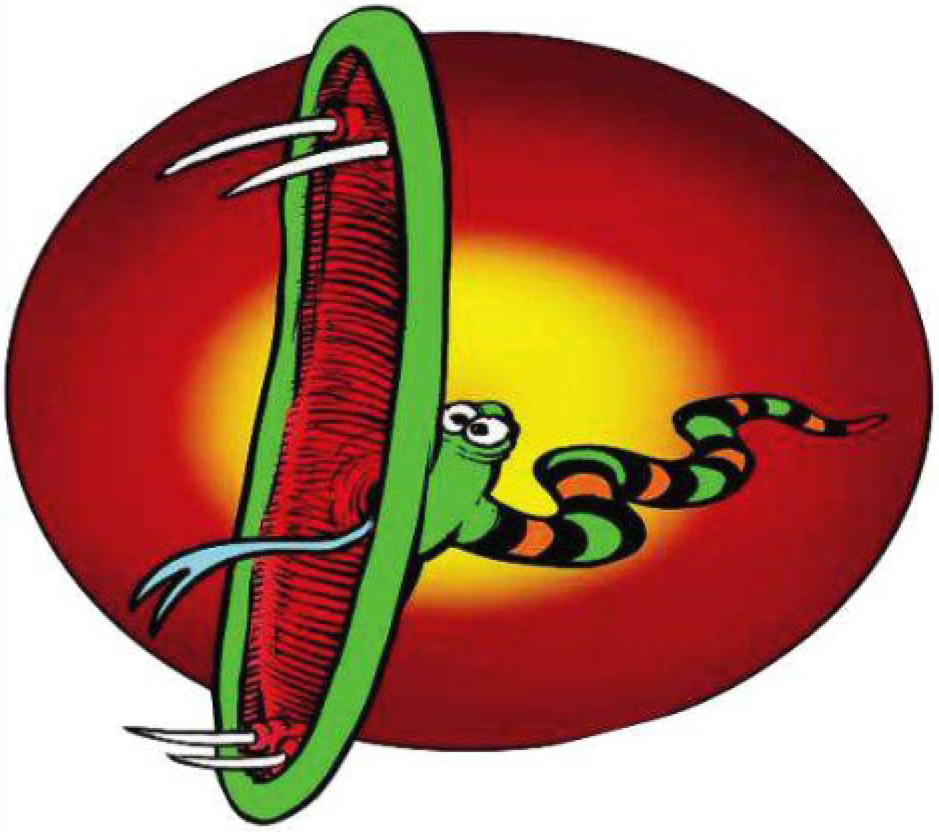
Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

139. SNAKES' JAWS

The myth

Snakes swallow prey that is bigger than their mouths by dislocating their jaws.



HUNT EMERSON

The "truth"

They don't dislocate their jaws, despite what we've always been told – instead, they simply open them very, *very* wide. Unlike the arrangement in mammals – where the upper jaw is rigidly attached to the skull and is therefore immobile – a snake's upper jaw is joined by flexible ligaments, tendons and muscles, which are interconnected. Also, the bones at the front of the lower jaw are not fused together, and can thus be moved apart. The quadrate bone, which links the two jaws, is a double hinge connected at four points. Snakes therefore have much greater movement – up and down, and side to side – of their jaws, which can open to 150 degrees. The whole process of bones moving within the skull is known as cranial kinesis. When tackling an oversized meal, the snake moves the various elements of its jaws in different directions, effectively "walking" its mouth over the prey.

Sources

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http://tinyurl.com/czsaek (peteducation.com)

Disclaimer

This is a slippery subject – if we've got the details wrong, please slither over to the letters page and put us right.

Update

Yet another twist on the man who supposedly turned orange after following a carrot juice diet [**FT115:26**; **FT206:17**]. A report in the *Daily Telegraph* (29 Oct 2008) tells of a 47-year-old man admitted to hospital in Brighton after friends noticed that his face was turning orange. Doctors blamed his five-year, seven-pints-a-day cider habit, and said they were "amazed" he wasn't dead. He made a full recovery.

FOR MORE MYTHCONCEPTIONS, GO TO:
www.forteantimes.com/strangedays/mythbusters

ARCHÆOLOGY

MATT PATTINSON

Humankind's development is turning out to be complex, reports **PAUL SIEVEKING**, and DNA evidence from China suggests that legends of Roman settlement there could be based on real events.

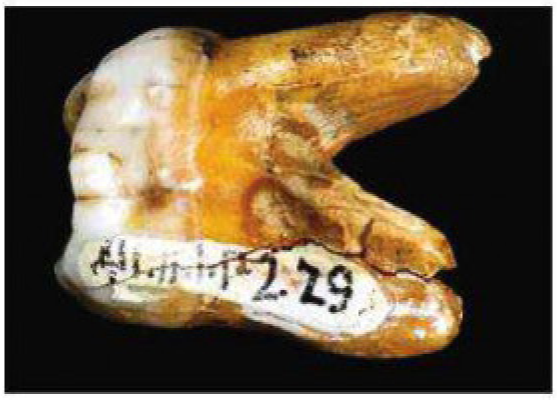
BOTH PIX: BENCE VIOLA / MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE FOR EVOLUTIONARY ARCHÆOLOGY

HUMAN STORY MODIFIED

A previously unknown species (or subspecies) of human, neither Neanderthal nor modern, has been identified by DNA extracted from a tooth and finger bone found in a Siberian cave and dated to between 30,000 and 50,000 years BP. The bone belonged to a juvenile female and was found in 2008 in the Denisova cave in the Altai Mountains of southern Siberia, alongside ornaments and jewellery. The molar tooth, probably from a young adult, was discovered there in 1980; it is unusually large and more closely resembles the teeth of earlier hominins, such as *Homo erectus*, than it does dentition from Neanderthals or modern humans.

The Denisovans, as they have been called, seem to be closer genetically to Neanderthals than to modern humans, having probably split off from the Neanderthal gene pool some 640,000 years BP. However, they share four to six per cent of the genome with the modern inhabitants of Melanesia (including Papua New Guinea), which runs counter to the current hypotheses of human migration. Such a surprising large north-south connection might indicate that the Denisovans had a large range in the east, as modern humans are thought to have lived on islands in Oceania for some 45,000 years.

In addition, the unclear origins of the small (and disputed) "hobbit" remains (*Homo floresiensis*, **FT191:4–5+16**; **194:18**; **236:20**; **246:18**; **252:18**) found on the Indonesian island of Flores in 2004 and dated to about 17,000 years BP suggest there might be more recently extinct human relatives yet to be found. Rick Potts, director of the human origins programme at the Smithsonian Institution, said the Melanesia finding could mean that the Melanesians and the Denisovans didn't intermix, but simply retained ancestral DNA sequences that had been lost in other populations sampled in the study. *[AP] 22 Dec; Nature, Scientific American, D.Mail, 23 Dec; Economist, 29 Dec 2010.*

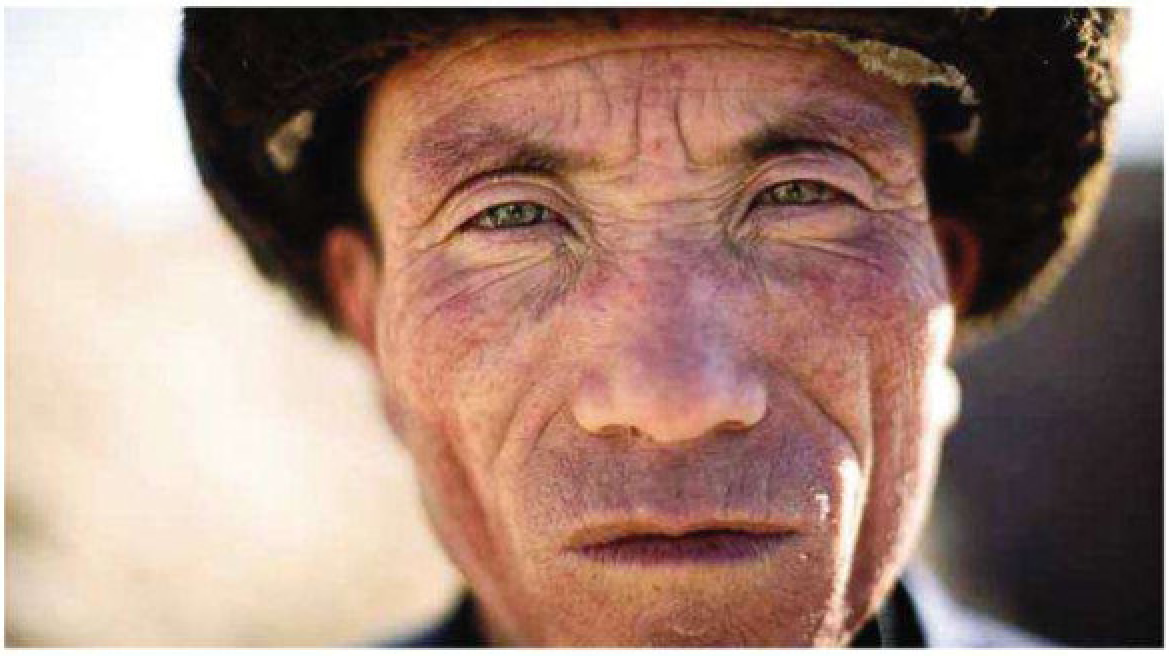


- A Tel Aviv University team excavating Qesem cave in central Israel have announced that eight teeth found in the cave resembling those of *Homo sapiens* are about 400,000 years old, twice the age of all other modern human remains. The team, led by Avi Gopher, examined the teeth with X-rays and CT scans and dated them according to the layers of earth in which they were found. If the identification and dating are conformed, the origin of modern humans will shift from Africa to the Levant.

Sir Paul Mellars, a prehistory expert at Cambridge University, said it was premature to conclude the remains are from *H.sapiens* – he thought them more likely to be Neanderthal. Bones offer a more reliable indicator of origin, and Prof. Gopher is confident his team will find bones as they continue their dig. Qesem Cave, located near Rosh Ha'ayin, was discovered in 2000, and first excavated in 2004. It has produced evidence of the systematic production of flint blades, the regular use of fire, and the cutting and sharing of animal meat. *American Journal of Physical Anthropology, Dec; [AP] 27 Dec; Science Daily, 31 Dec 2010.*

- The discovery of early modern human fossil remains in the Zhirendong (Zhiren Cave) in south China at least 100,000 years old provides the earliest evidence for the emergence of modern humans in the Far East, at least 60,000 years older than the previously known modern humans in the region. The fossils have a mixture of modern and archaic features that contrasts with earlier modern

NATALIE BEHRING



TOP: The cave where the Denisovan tooth (centre) was found. **ABOVE:** Cai Junnian, known as "Cai the Roman", from north-west China, thinks he is descended from a Roman legion from the days of the Republic.

humans in east Africa and southwest Asia, indicating some degree of human population continuity in Asia with the emergence of modern humans. *Proceedings of the Chinese National Academy of Sciences (online edition) 25 Oct; Science Daily, 28 Oct 2010.*

ROMAN DESCENDANTS IN CHINA?

Genetic testing of villagers in Liqian, on the fringes of the Gobi Desert in north-western China, has shown that 56 per cent of their DNA is of Caucasian origin, lending support to the legend that they are descended from a 'lost legion' of Roman soldiers. Many of the villagers have blue or green eyes, long noses and even fair hair. A local man, Cai Junnian, is nicknamed by his friends and relatives Cai Luoma, or Cai the Roman, and is one of many villagers convinced that he is descended from the lost legion.

Archæologists plan to conduct digs in the region to search for remains of forts or other structures built by the fabled army, which is thought to have settled in the area after fleeing a disastrous battle in 53 BC between an army led by Marcus Crassus and a larger force of Parthians, bringing to an abrupt halt the Roman Republic's eastwards expansion. Thousands of Romans were slaughtered and Crassus himself was beheaded.

The Romans fugitives supposedly fought as mercenaries in a war between the Huns and the Chinese in 36 BC – Chinese chroniclers refer to the capture of a "fish-scale formation" of troops, a possible reference to the "tortoise" phalanx formation perfected by legionaries. The Romans are thought to have been released and to have settled on the steppes of western China.

The theory was first put forward in the 1950s by Homer Dubs, a professor of Chinese history at Oxford University, but will not find general acceptance without the discovery of Roman artefacts. An alternative hypothesis is that the Liqian villagers are descended from the armies of Huns that marauded through central Asia, which included soldiers of Caucasian origin.

The Roman Empire reached its greatest territorial extent under the Emperor Trajan in the 2nd century AD, just as the Han empire was on the wane. Most historians believe that the two empires had only indirect contact, as silk and spices were traded along the Silk Road in exchange for Roman goods such as glassware. *D.Telegraph, 23 Nov 2010.*

CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

135. THE OLD DUPE PEDLARS

(titular apologies to Tom Lehrer)

"Imposture merges away into self-deception so that only relatively has there ever been an impostor" – Fort, *Books*, p669.

The first classical hoax was Helen of Troy (below). Herodotus (*Histories*, bk2 chs118–20) believed she remained in Egypt for the war's duration, Achilles and company spending 10 years fighting over a doppelgänger, perhaps a phantom. Some scope for Churchillian cadences here – Some Chick, Some…

Persian king Cambyses should have been succeeded by son Smerdis. But he was dead, so the throne was usurped by his physical double, one of the Magi. It worked for several months, until the fake Smerdis was detected by one of his wives who, taking her first turn in his bedroom rotation, discovered that he was earless, the result of a previous punishment. End of usurper – Herodotus, bk3 chs61–79. A North Korean solution – keep the dead ruler in official charge – might have been a better bet.

Upon his accession, Tiberius had Augustus's grandson Agrippa Postumus liquidated in his island exile. Three years later, Agrippa's slave Clemens masqueraded as his late master and appeared in Italy to great acclaim – such impostures were easy in a world without photographs or television. An alarmed Tiberius had him arrested in Rome and done away with in the palace – Tacitus, *Annals*, bk2 chs39–40.

After his 'artistic' suicide (think Peter Ustinov in *Quo Vadis?*) and secret burial, three fake Neros appeared in regular sequence (AD 69, 79, 89) over the next decades, the last one being especially popular with Rome's eastern enemy, Parthia – obvious chance to cause trouble: Suetonius, *Nero*, ch57 para2; Tacitus, *Histories*, bk2 chs8–9; Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, bk64 ch9 para3.

We ought perhaps to ask why the evil Nero remained so talismanic? Shades of those reported Hitlerian epiphanies after the War? Or Nero's understandable popularity for (e.g.) lavish shows in Rome, remitting Greeks all taxation, and suchlike goodies?

At the imperial level, hoaxes went both ways. Suetonius (*Caligula*, ch47) says that the emperor dressed up slaves as prisoners of war to boost an undeserved triumph. Tacitus (*Agricola*, ch39 para1) levels the same charge against Domitian. I have read that this same stunt was pulled by that modern Caligula, Idi Amin.

In his own lifetime, Nero was duped (Tacitus, *Annals*, bk16 chs1–3) by a lunatic Carthaginian, Cæsellius Bassus, who (claiming many previous successful manifestations) told the cash-strapped emperor that a dream had revealed to him the site of Queen Dido's immense buried treasure. Hopes ran high, nothing was found, Bassus took refuge in suicide.

Philostratus (*Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, bk6 ch39) mentions a fellow who sacrificed to Mother Earth in hopes of excavating buried treasure – a tip for lottery hopefuls?

One of the thaumaturge Apollonius's acolytes was a quack doctor whose come-ons (what spam he would nowadays have generated!) included ads for love-charms, lethal spells against enemies (what Kipling called 'sendings'), and how to find buried treasure. All this seduced his young rent-boy Alexander of Abonoteichus into pulling off one of the biggest scams in ancient history.

Lucian, who finally unmasked him along with (strange bedfellows) local Christians and Epicureans, tells the story in his *Alexander the False Prophet*. His rascally career (AD 150–170), in which he duped more than one high Roman official, is attested by coins and inscriptions. Along with a freelance pop-song writer, Cocconas, Alexander concocted his grand design, financed by a credulous rich widow. Planted fake prophecies, the cooked-up public discovery of a divine serpent, oracles delivered in impressive gibberish along with fake religious seizures, and the staging of godly utterances through 'autophones' (thereby anticipating *The Wizard of Oz*) earned him notoriety any modern televangelist would envy.

Lucian reports his comeuppance with undisguised glee: "a most wretched death" from gangrened leg and maggots infesting his groin – a fate the likes of Jerry Falwell and Oral Roberts unhappily escaped.

One Byzantine look-in (Agathias, *Histories*, bk5 chs6–8). Quarrelling with his Constantinopolitan neighbour Zeno, the famous architect-engineer Anthemius (designer of Justinian's Hagia Sophia) contrived mock earthquakes and thunderstorms with contraptions of boiling cauldrons, elaborate pipes (beats your average Polish plumber), and powerful solar reflecting devices to terrify his enemy into public flight and consequent embarrassment – strong candidate for 'Neighbour From Hell' status.

Of course, if we believe the much-publicised allegations of Anatoly Fomenko that all ancient history is a mediæval delusion, then everything in this column is itself a hoax.

GETTY IMAGES / HULTON ARCHIVE

CATHOLIC NEWS

MARIAN APPARITIONS, WEEPING STATUES AND A SECRETIVE SECT

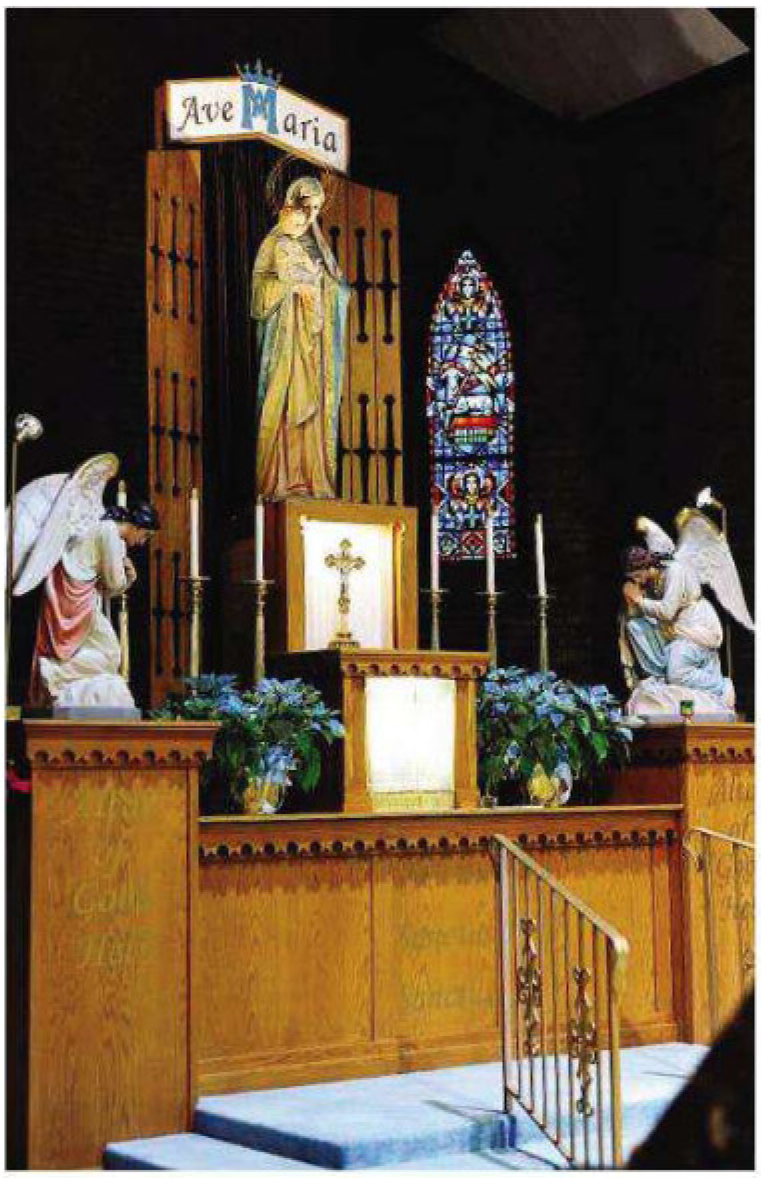
MARY OF THE PRAIRIE

A town in Wisconsin has been officially recognised as the Roman Catholic Church's first holy apparition site in the US, joining a select group of 11 places that includes Lourdes in France, Fátima in Portugal and Guadalupe in Mexico. After a two-year inquiry by a panel of Catholic theologians specialising in Marian apparitions, David Ricken, the bishop of Green Bay, Wisconsin, has formally decreed with "moral certainty" that the events commemorated at the Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help near Champion are "worthy of belief (although not obligatory) by the Christian faithful". Champion is just east of the city of Green Bay on Lake Michigan.

In October 1859, a year after Bernadette Soubirous spotted the BVM (Blessed Virgin Mary) in Lourdes, another young French-speaking woman – Adele Brise, 28 – received what she claimed were three visits from a woman in shining white clothes who identified herself as "the Queen of Heaven who prays for the conversion of sinners". Brise went on to become a Franciscan nun and established a Catholic school near the spot where she first saw Mary. Originally known as Robinsonville, the town was renamed Champion – after the Belgian town where Brise had planned to live before her family had crossed the Atlantic – six years before she died in 1896. Over the past century, a small but persistent trickle of pilgrims have visited Brise's home and school, where a shrine was eventually constructed and an elaborate chapel now stands, amid dairy farms and fields of oats and soya beans.

Some commentators have wondered how Ricken's anonymous experts were able, so long after the fact, to establish the "moral certainty" of Brise's visions. The bishop told the Catholic News Agency that Brise's life of devotion to good works after the apparitions supported the validity of her account. He also claimed to have heard "countless stories of answered prayers", including reports of "what many call miracles", from pilgrims who had visited the site. The chapel displays a pile of crutches and walking sticks left behind by visitors who claimed their ailments had been cured.

Wisconsin is also the setting of a far less venerable apparition. In 1949, a farmer's wife named Mary Van Hoof reported visions of the BVM and a shrine was duly erected at her home in Necedah. The Church declared the visions a fraud. It later emerged that pilgrims to Necedah were told they would be spared Armageddon by a 1,200-year-old man named Joe who would arrive in a spaceship to rescue them. Van Hoof died in 1984, but Necedah went on to become a pilgrimage site and a visitor centre still welcomes believers. Joe has yet to appear. *[AP] 8 Dec; D.Telegraph, 10 Dec; Sunday Times, 19 Dec 2010.*



TOP: The Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help, Green Bay.
ABOVE: Visionary nun Adele Brise saw the BVM.

BOTH PIX COURTESY GREEN BAY DIOCESE

THE ROAD TO SAINTHOOD

On 14 January, Pope Benedict XVI gave the green light for Pope John Paul II's beatification after signing a decree that attributed the 2005 recovery of a French nun from Parkinson's disease to a posthumous intercession by the Polish pontiff [**FT224:8–9**], despite a report last year that one of the doctors charged with scrutinising the case believed the nun, Sister Marie Simon-Pierre, might have been suffering from a nervous disease similar to Parkinson's, which could go into remission; and a further report that the 49-year-old had suffered a relapse [**FT263:8**].

Benedict has called Karol Wojtyla "John Paul the Great", making him only the fourth pope in history to have that title. The beatification ceremony in St Peter's basilica on 1 May this year will attract up to a million of the faithful and is expected to give the Catholic Church a much-needed boost after the worldwide scandals of pædophilic priests. Canonisation, of course, would require a second approved miracle.

The last pope to be declared a saint was Pius X (Giuseppe Melchiorre Sarto, 1865–1914), but this didn't happen until 1954. Sarto's coffin was exhumed in 1944, and his body declared "in an excellent state of conservation"; whether the same holds true for Wojtyla remains to be seen. Following his beatification in May, a vial containing his blood, taken at a clinic in Rome during a tracheotomy operation shortly before his death on 2 April 2005, will be installed as a relic in a Polish church. It will be encased in crystal and built into the altar of a church in the southern city of Krakow. Krzysztof Madal, an influential Jesuit priest, has denounced the plan as "mediæval". *Irish Independent, 6 Jan; D.Telegraph, Guardian, Irish Times, 15 Jan; Independent, 18 Jan 2011.*

ANGEL SECT WARNING

The Vatican has warned Catholic bishops around the world about a breakaway faction of a secretive traditionalist sect called Opus Angelorum ("the work of angels"). The sect was founded in 1949 by a group of priests and seminarians in Innsbruck, Austria, and drew inspiration from the visions experienced by Gabriele Bitterlich (1896–1978), a woman from the Austrian Tyrol, who claimed to have been in contact with an archangel and to have written down the names and functions of hundreds of angels and demons. Some of her followers circulated sensational theories of "spiritual warfare" between angels and demons, based on her writings, and in 1977 Cardinal Joseph Höffner, Archbishop of Cologne, asked the Holy See to institute an enquiry. The sect – which operates mainly in Germany, Austria, Italy, Portugal, India, the Philippines, Brazil, Mexico, and the US, and has recruited dozens of Catholic priests and nuns – claims that women who have had abortions are possessed by the devil.

In 1992, the sect agreed to follow the doctrine of the Church in return for official recognition. According to Cardinal William Levada, head of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "…members were not to make use of the 'names' of angels derived from the alleged private revelations attributed to Mrs Gabriele Bitterlich and they were not to teach, spread or make use of the theories originating from these alleged revelations. Furthermore, they were reminded of the duty to follow strictly all liturgical laws, in particular those relating to the Holy Eucharist." However, several members of the sect, including some priests, refused to follow these instructions, and sought to restore the "authentic Opus Angelorum". The latest missive from the Vatican warns that "…very discreet propaganda in favour of this wayward movement [i.e. the breakaway faction], which is outside of any ecclesiastical control, is taking place, aimed at presenting it as if it were in full communion with the Catholic Church." *BBC News, 4 Nov 2010; Wikipedia entry on "Opus Sanctorum Angelorum".*

MORE WEEPING STATUES

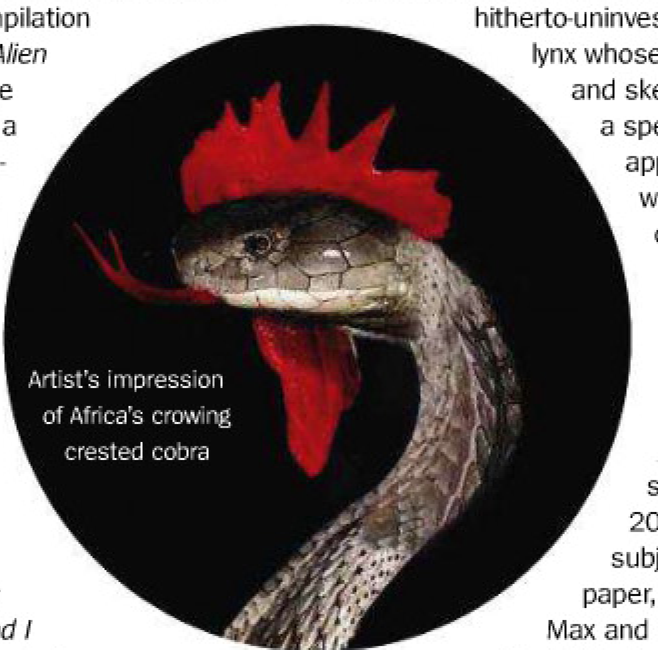
Following the report of a crying BVM statue in Windsor, Ontario, last November [**FT272:9**], another one has been reported in Reading, Ohio. The Blessed Virgin was said to have two teardrops on her face, one on her chin, the other on her cheek. The statue is located in Our Lady Queen of Reading religious lending library. Someone said the tears began to form around Christmas when "a visionary" visited the library; someone else said they started after a rosary, which belonged to the Rev. James Willig, who died nearly 10 years ago, was placed in the statue's hands. A statue of Jesus in the library was also said to be crying. *WCPO Cincinnati, 2 Jan 2011.*

AZ ALIEN ZOO

KARL SHUKER presents his regular round-up from the cryptozoological garden

A LIZARD WORTH CROWING ABOUT?

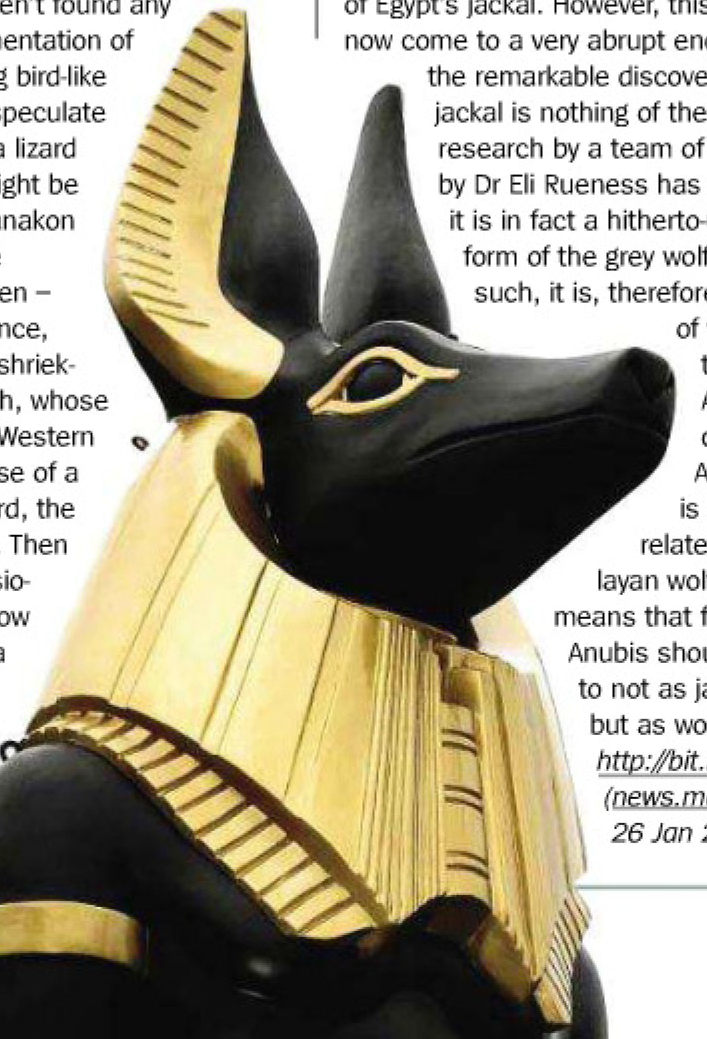
In an AZ column for 2009 [**FT245:16**], I reported an unidentified snake called the banakon, supposedly indigenous to the Philippine island of Mindanao, that can allegedly crow like a cockerel (reminiscent of Africa's mysterious crowing crested cobra and also certain cryptozoological serpents reported from the West Indies). When graphic artist Andy Paciorek read this report in my recently published compilation volume, *Karl Shuker's Alien Zoo* (2010), he sent me the following details of a most intriguing encounter he had while working with a carnival in Mindanao's northern region around October 1997:



Artist's impression of Africa's crowing crested cobra

… one night after work, so late into night / early morning, I was on the outskirts of Cagayan de Oro getting some food and a beer. It was in a more rural area and I could hear a bird calling in the trees. Cannot recall the exact sound (not cockerel-like as I'd grown up round hens and there was no shortage of actual cockerels in that area as alas many of the locals reared them to fight). Not like an owl either, anyway unusual enough for me to ask a local what kind of bird it was and they replied that it was actually a lizard. I couldn't see it… but I seem to recall the locals saying it was bigger than the ubiquitous geckos… The sound wasn't exactly a crowing, but was bird-like, pretty loud and nocturnal.

Although I have read various scientifically confirmed accounts of lizards (and even certain species of snake) emitting some surprising vocalisations, I haven't found any formally-verified documentation of a Filipino lizard emitting bird-like cries – although I did speculate in my AZ column that a lizard rather than a snake might be behind some of the banakon reports. Of course, the locals could be mistaken – as they were, for instance, with Sumatra's fabled shrieking centipede, the upah, whose cries turned out upon Western investigation to be those of a reclusive species of bird, the Malaysian honeyguide. Then again, there is no physiological barrier that I know of that would prevent a lizard from emitting a call of this nature. But until such a rowdy reptile is captured or at least directly witnessed giving vent to such a sound, the matter remains unresolved. *Andy Paciorek, pers. comms, 18 Dec 2010, 7 Jan 2011.*



A MISSING LYNX NO LONGER

Bristol University zoology undergraduate and CFZ member Max Blake recently made a remarkable discovery in the archives of the Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery – a hitherto-uninvestigated stuffed lynx whose mounted skin and skeleton are from a specimen that was apparently shot in the wild in Britain over a century ago. This specimen, which was briefly featured in a subsequent *Autumnwatch* BBC1 television programme (episode 6, screened 11 Nov 2010), is currently the subject of a scientific paper, co-authored by Max and Portsmouth University-affiliated palæontologist Dr Darren Naish, which contains full details of this extraordinary find. (I have additional information on file, kindly supplied to me in confidence by the above authors, but I have naturally agreed not to publish anything more before their paper appears.) *http://bit.ly/dJfj7r (forteanzoology.blogspot.com), 18 Nov 2010.*

AN IDENTITY CRISIS FOR ANUBIS?

One of the most familiar members of ancient Egypt's pantheon of gods is Anubis (below), the deity of mummification. For untold ages, Anubis has always been referred to as jackal-headed, on account of being portrayed with a canine head traditionally identified as that of Egypt's jackal. However, this tradition has now come to a very abrupt end, thanks to the remarkable discovery that Egypt's jackal is nothing of the sort. Genetic research by a team of researchers led by Dr Eli Rueness has revealed that it is in fact a hitherto-unrecognised form of the grey wolf *Canis lupus*. As such, it is, therefore, the only form of wolf native to the continent of Africa, has been duly dubbed the African wolf, and is most closely related to the Himalayan wolf. This in turn means that from now on, Anubis should be referred to not as jackal-headed but as wolf-headed. *http://bit.ly/i8jpg4 (news.mongabay.com), 26 Jan 2011.*

GETTY IMAGES / GARETH CATTERMOLE

ALTERED STATE SECRETS

From espionage to TV exposure, a hidden room, plus mystic advice to Tory ex-leader

SPY FRONTS FORTEAN MYSTERIES SHOW

Anna Chapman, 28, the notorious redhead who was part of the Russian sleeper ring busted by the FBI last June, made her debut as a television presenter on 21 January in a new primetime series on Russian TV called *Secrets of the World with Anna Chapman*. Previously, she had posed semi-naked with a pistol on the cover of the Russian edition of *Maxim*, attended a rocket launch, been presented with a tiger cub on a TV chat show, and become a leader of the Young Guard, the youth wing of Vladimir Putin's United Russia party. She also appears to be starting a campaign for parliamentary elections next December: in the first week of February, she took part in a commemoration of the 68th anniversary of the Soviet victory in the Battle of Stalingrad, followed by a visit to an orphanage in the city, her birthplace, now called Volgograd.

The hour-long weekly show looks into various bizarre occurrences and unexplained mysteries. The first programme investigated the case of Ali Yakubov, a baby born in the southern Russian republic of Dagestan, on whose skin appeared verses from the Koran [**FT257:21**]. "I'm Anna Chapman," she said at the start of the programme, flicking her famous red hair, "and I'll reveal all the secrets."

One mystery she will not be delving into is what exactly she got up to in the US, and how successful she was at uncovering any real secrets during her time there. She is banned from selling her story under a deal she struck with the US authorities. However, she did give intriguing hints about her career. While discussing the theory that Yakubov's parents might have faked the Koranic verses using henna, she said: "I've been to Arab countries and I've seen how they do it there." At one point, she claimed that "her sources" in Dagestan had told her that the lives of the baby's family were at risk. "They didn't want to speak to any journalists," she said, "but I managed to talk them round."

LEFT: Glamorous Russian ex-spy Anna Chapman now has her own TV show.

GETTY IMAGES / AFP PHOTO / REN TV

> **"I'm Anna Chapman and I'll reveal all the secrets..."**

Her role in the programme was restricted to providing in-studio segues between video clips while pouting suggestively. The programme itself, with its mix of bearded "experts", melodramatic music and repeated gruesome shots of bodies covered in stigmata, was more *Brass Eye* than *Panorama*, though maybe it bore some resemblance to the fortean series on British TV fronted by the less nubile Lionel Fanthorpe. Subsequent episodes will be devoted to the fate of the famous Amber Room, looted by the Nazis and subsequently lost [**FT237:20–21**] as well as the case of a four-year-old boy from near Moscow who is alleged to have spontaneously combusted in 2010. *D.Telegraph, 22 Jan; Independent on Sunday, 23 Jan 2011.*

LIBRARY'S SECRET CHAMBER

A secret room has been found in the National Library in Kolkata (the former Calcutta), a building that has long had a reputation for being haunted – with rumours of the ballroom being lit up and carriages drawing up in the driveway. Belvedere House, as it was known during the Raj, was among the many buildings erected in Alipore in the 1760s by Mir Jafar Ali Khan, the Nawab of Bengal, after he was forced to abdicate his throne in Murshidabad. He gave it to Warren Hastings, the first Governor General of India. What happened to the house between 1780, when Hastings is said to have sold it, and 1854, when it became the official residence of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, is uncertain; but from then until 1911 it housed a number of Lieut Governors until the British capital was shifted to Delhi. After Indian Independence, the National Library (then in Esplanade) was transferred to Belvedere House, but currently the books are in a new building on the 30-acre (12ha) campus site while the old Belvedere House is being restored by ASI (the Archæological Survey of India).

It was while surveying the interior and exterior of the building that conservation engineers came upon a "blind enclosure" on the ground floor, about 1,000 sq ft (93 sq m) in size. "We've searched every inch of the first floor area that forms the ceiling of this enclosure for a possible trap door, but found nothing," said Tapan Bhattacharya, ASI's deputy superintending archæologist.

"Restoration of the building will remain incomplete if we are not able to access what lies inside." DV Sharma, the regional director of ASI, said: "It could be just about anything. Skeletons and treasure chests are the two things that top our speculations because it is not natural for a building to have such a huge enclosure that has no opening. We cannot break down a wall, considering the importance of the building, so we have decided to bore a hole through the wall to peer inside with a searchlight." National Library authorities have written to the Ministry of Culture seeking permission to do this. We await developments. *Times of India, 20 Nov 2010.*

GETTY IMAGES / HULTON ARCHIVE

MRS THATCHER AND THE MYSTIC

Shri Natwar Singh, former Indian Foreign Minister, has revealed details of meetings between Margaret Thatcher and Sri Chandraswamy, the eccentric preacher and faith healer. In 1975, Mr Singh was India's Deputy High Commissioner to the UK when Chandraswamy arrived in London and requested a meeting with Mrs Thatcher, the newly elected leader of the Conservative opposition. The Indian tantrik had already made a name for himself as a spiritual adviser to celebrities and politicians such as Nancy Reagan, Elizabeth Taylor, the Sultan of Brunei. Mrs Thatcher agreed to a meeting, but said it would only last 10 minutes.

Chandraswamy arrived at her Commons office wearing an orange shawl, with a *tilak* mark on his forehead, beads round his neck and carrying a staff. He gave the politician five strips of paper and, with Mr Singh acting as translator, asked her to write a question on each and scrunch them up. She obliged with "scarcely camouflaged irritation" and watched as the guru closed his eyes and went into a trance. When he emerged, he asked her to open the paper balls one by one and correctly told her the question written on each. "Irritation gave way to subdued curiosity," Mr Singh recalled. "By the fourth question, I thought, she began to consider Chandraswamy a holy man indeed. Chandraswamy was like a triumphant guru and took off his slippers and sat on the sofa in the lotus position. I was appalled, but Mrs Thatcher seemed to approve. She asked more questions and, in each case, Chandraswamy's response overwhelmed her."

The mystic cut short the meeting by announcing that the Sun had set, so that he could not continue. But, at Mrs Thatcher's request, he arranged to meet her again at Mr Singh's house a few days later. Mr Singh said: "Just as we were about to leave, Mr Holy Man produced a talisman tied to a not-so-tidy piece of string and said that Mrs Thatcher should tie it on her left arm when she came to my house. She immediately took the talisman. I was relieved to finally say goodbye when Chandraswamy turned to me and said: 'Kindly tell Mrs Thatcher that she should also wear a red *poshak* [dress].' I felt like hitting him, he was clearly overdoing it now."

However, when Mrs Thatcher arrived at Mr Singh's house in Hampstead, north London, she was wearing a red dress and the talisman. "She asked many questions that day," recalled the former diplomat, "but the most important ones were related to the chances of her becoming the prime minister. Chandraswamy did not disappoint. He predicted that she would be PM for either nine, 11 or 13 years. Of course, Mrs Thatcher believed that she would become PM one day, but I thought predicting the number of years was a bit much. Mrs Thatcher asked one final question: When would she become prime minister? 'In three or four years,' Chandraswamy announced."

The grocer's daughter from Grantham was duly elected to Number 10 four years later and held office for 11 years. After reaching the top of the greasy pole, she appeared to become embarrassed about her sessions with the holy man. At the Commonwealth Summit in Zambia in 1979, Mr Singh suggested to her: "Our man was proved right". "For a moment, she seemed flustered," he recalled. "Then she took me aside and said: 'High Commissioner, we don't talk about these matters'." *D.Mail, 29 Jan 2011.*

BOTTOM LEFT: Ex-PM Margaret Thatcher. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Sri Chandraswamy, the Indian guru who is said to have impressed Dame Thatcher when she led the Tories.

GETTY IMAGES / AFP / TEKEE TANWAR

KONSPIRACY KORNER

ROBIN RAMSAY, EDITOR OF *LOBSTER*, PONDERS THE DIFFERENT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONSPIRACY THEORY AND THE MEDIA IN BRITAIN AND THE US.

This appears to be the only column in the English-language media about conspiracy theories – which is odd when you consider their prominence in the English-speaking world. For while at some levels conspiracy theories are a source of amusement – David Icke believes *what*? – a sizeable number of Republican Party supporters now hold conspiracy theories about President Obama: at their most absurd, Obama is a Muslim Marxist who plans a socialist America. An opinion poll last year found that almost one in five Americans believe Obama to be a Muslim.[1]

The Obama theories have been propagated largely on radio and the Internet. A combination of the constitutional right to free speech and the absence of obligations on media to tell the truth or be 'balanced', means that in America you can broadcast as many lies as you can afford to pay for.

A Democratic president assailed by conspiracy theories from the right? We have been here before. Hilary Clinton famously spoke of her husband being the victim of a "vast right-wing conspiracy".[2] Even though Bill Clinton couldn't keep his pecker in his pants, his wife's claim was true, and was described in some detail in the memoir of a member of said conspiracy, David Brock.[3] We may also presume that Mrs Clinton discussed her statement with the writer Sidney Blumenthal, one of the Clintons' closest advisors. While at the *Washington Post* in the 1980s, Blumenthal wrote a book on the rise of the American right, and knew what the Clinton administration was going to face from it.[4]

The Koch brothers, American billionaires, are funding a big chunk of the anti-Obama movements, including the Tea Party – a political movement partly fuelled by the conspiracy theories about Obama – which has gained control of sections of the Republican Party and recently elected 40 of its candidates to Congress and five to the Senate.[5] In America, conspiracy theories matter – and may come to matter a great deal as Americans search for explanations of their nation's decline.

In Britain, they matter less. Our own far right's attempts in the 1950s and 60s to explain the decline of the British Empire with Communist or Jewish conspiracy theories attracted few adherents. Only the theories around the deaths of Dr David Kelly and Diana, Princess of Wales, have received much coverage recently from the major British media. The latter got attention because Diana's dead boyfriend's dad owned the *Daily Express* and used it to push the theories. Kelly's death has received much coverage from the *Mail* and the *Express* – the *Mail* ran extracts from the book about it by Norman Baker MP – because the story damages the Labour Party.

Why are political conspiracy theories less important here? I don't know, and have seen no explorations of the subject. In his diaries, Tony Blair's former spin-doctor, Alastair Campbell, complains constantly about inaccurate and lazy reporting by the British press. His Democratic Party equivalents have to deal with media whose *job* it is to destroy them, in a society which allows them to try. Any explanation of the comparatively weak appeal of political conspiracy theories in this country would have to begin with our severe libel laws and the legal restrictions on the British media.

NOTES

1 http://bit.ly/cNm9dP (people-press.org).

2 "The Today Show", NBC, 27 Jan 1998.

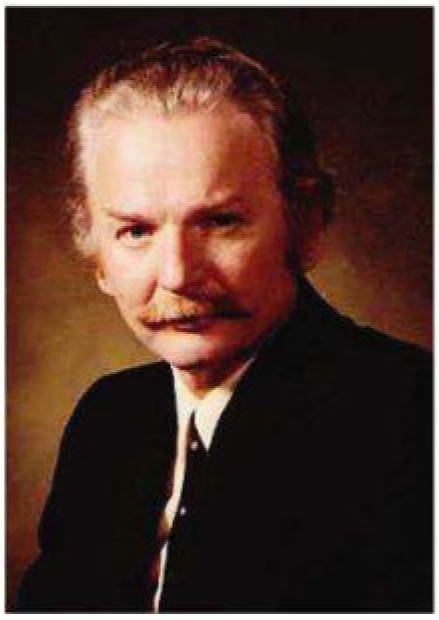
3 *Blinded by the Right*, Random House, New York, 2002.

4 *The Rise of the Counter-establishment*, Times Books, New York, 1986.

5 On the Kochs, see Jane Mayer: "Covert Operations: The billionaire brothers who are waging a war against Obama", *New Yorker*, 30 Aug 2010. This is available online at http://nyr.kr/dsf9H9.

NECROLOG

We note the passing of a noted psychiatrist and theorist on paranormal subjects, and a cyclist who took things to extremes.



BERTHOLD ERIC SCHWARZ

A US Navy veteran who became a doctor in 1950, Bert Schwarz (above) decided to pursue psychiatry. By 1955, he had become a certified psychiatrist and spent the next 45 years in private practice in Montclair, New Jersey, and Vero Beach, Florida. Professionally, he was a Distinguished Life Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association and a Diplomate of the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology.

He was an expert on the effects of LSD on hypnotically induced seizures, but his abiding interest was the field of altered states of consciousness associated with anomalous experience, for which Jerry Clark has numbered him among the most influential "parapsychological theorists". His professionalism, demonstrated in hundreds of articles and more than a dozen books, gained him fellowships of the American Society for Psychical Research, the Academy of Spirituality and Paranormal Studies, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

He was keenly aware that UFO and alien abduction incidents were but one nexus in the great tapestry of interconnecting experiences and appreciated that this included many fortean topics. This led him to make many observations that enhanced ufology – in particular its relationship with Bigfoot encounters and psychical phenomena. These were previously thought unconnected and dealt with separately, if at all, partly because the experiencers thought they might bring ridicule, partly because such cross-category 'mixing' might draw accusations of intellectual or academic sloppiness, and partly because they were the kind of details that many narrow-minded investigators did *not* want to hear.

Schwarz's bold interdisciplinary approach was developed in a series of books including *Psychic Dynamics* (1961), which looked at experiences that seem to transcend the limitations of time and space; *A Psychiatrist Looks at ESP* (1965); *PSI and the Life Cycle* (1974); and *Psychic-nexus: Psychic Phenomena in Psychiatry and Everyday Life* (1980). Perhaps the most important of these are the two books which comprise *UFO Dynamics: Psychiatric and Psychic Aspects of the UFO Syndrome* (1983), in which Schwarz collates his various papers and studies on the parapsychological experiences of UFO percipients, including such topics as Men in Black, Bigfoot-like humanoids, poltergeist effects accompanying encounters, 'channelled' messages, and the private histories of psychic experiences reported by abductees and contactees.

He also published several in-depth studies of psychic contactees, including *The Jacques Romano Story* (1968), the biography of a noted occultist and parapsychologist who died in 1962; *UFO Contactee Stella Lansing: Possible Medical Implications of her Motion Picture Experiments* (1976); and *Into the Crystal: The Miracles of Peter Sugleris* (1989 & 1992), a study of a teenager who seemed to be able to bend objects like Uri Geller, and levitate himself and objects.

In an interview with Michael Tymn, Schwarz said that his interest in ESP and paranormal phenomena probably began in childhood, listening to the radio broadcasts of Joseph Dunninger, America's famous 'mentalist'. Both his parents believed in psychical abilities, which encouraged him to note instances of precognition and telepathy within the family – for instance he told of being "jolted by my mother's telepathic apprehension of my brother, Eric, being killed in action in WWII".

Over the years, Schwarz met and worked with many of the famous names from the golden age of parapsychology, including his "colleague-friends" Jule Eisenbud, Jan Ehrenwald, Nandor Fodor, Joost Meerloo, Ian Stevenson and Montague Ullman; magicians such as Joseph Dunninger and Kreskin; and psychics Jacques Romano, Arthur Ford, Gerard Croiset, Henry Gross, Joe Nuzum, and Peter Sugleris (whose video of his "levitation in his mother's backyard" Schwarz found particularly convincing). He also made a study of the feats of the Pennsylvania Holiness movement, which included handling fire and poisonous snakes and drinking strychnine.

However, his own star drew him deeper into the "psychiatric paranormal aspects" of UFO abduction and encounter experiences; in particular the photographic anomalies of Stella Lansing, a Massachusetts housewife who not only seemed to be able to film UFOs at will, but whose images included a number of highly unusual effects he was convinced were the product of PSI interaction with the recording medium (thoughtography). His other great muse was the renowned abductee Betty Hill, in whose presence he himself had many UFO-related experiences. The range and eclectic nature of his research interests can be judged from the titles of his articles – including *Clinical Observations on Telekinesis* (1971); *Possible Human-Animal Paranormal Events* (1973); and *A UFO Motion Picture Experiment (at Betty Hill's Landing Field)* (1979) – often bound as off-prints for friends and colleagues and which still pop up in online book sales.

Schwarz scotched any suggestion that these experiences have anything to do with mental illness or unconscious fabrication. "What they say they saw they think they saw!" What was central to these and many other overlap topics was the experiencer, for whom Schwarz felt both a sincere personal and a professional obligation to understand. The gratitude from his patients, informants and correspondents is evident in their published statements. This level of confidence and professionalism engendered an intimacy that produced some startling narratives. For example, in *UFO Dynamics*, he tells of going back to re-interview the witnesses to the 'contact' events surrounding Howard Menger who, in the 1950s, claimed to have met visitors from Venus, Mars and Saturn. When Menger's 12-year-old son was dying of brain cancer, the boy's mother and several other witnesses told Schwarz of seeing a pulsating "bar of light" over the boy's bed shortly before he died. The boy also spoke of "beings from Orion" who "are coming to take me away". Of these and his own direct experiences of the paranormal – such as levitation, telekinesis, and 'matter through matter' – says Schwarz, "Some of the best examples cannot be reported, as they are too personal, or must be consigned to footnotes or the 'time capsule'."

Schwarz encouraged anyone who showed an interest in psychical research to pursue their studies diligently. He told Tymn: "A psychiatrist, if so interested and trained, is in an exceptional position to undertake this task," not least because their direct experience of doctor-patient telepathy during their sessions will help them understand the role of telepathy in normal human interactions. He, quite literally, wrote the book on this – *Parent-Child Telepathy* (1971) – being a very frank and pioneering account of hundreds of carefully logged psychic interactions between him and his children, Lisa and Eric. It had the deliberately unsensational subtitle: 'A study of the telepathy of everyday life'.

Schwarz corresponded with *FT*, intermittently, from 1975 – around our second year – complimenting us on presenting "the oldest news

in the world, yet the latest and the greatest. Nothing makes more exciting reading and you are in the forefront of this."
Berthold Eric Schwarz, psychiatrist, born in Jersey City, New Jersey 20 Oct 1924; died Florida 16 Sept 2010, aged 85.
Bob Rickard

JURE ROBIC

was a Slovenian soldier-turned-extreme cyclist who won the 3,000 miles (4,800km) Race Across America five times. There were no scheduled breaks, so an ability to go without sleep is the main determinant of who wins. During the 2004 race, Robic cycled an average of 350 miles (560km) a day to complete the race in eight days, claiming only eight hours' sleep, and pedalled into the record books by covering 518 miles (834km) in 24 hours. In 2005, six weeks after scoring his second victory in the Race Across America, he won Le Tour Direct, a 2,500-mile (4,000km) race on a course contrived from the most testing Tour de France routes. He finished in seven days and 19 hours, climbing about 26 miles (42km) in all – the equivalent of nearly five trips up Everest.

He pushed himself beyond any natural physical and mental limits; for weeks after the Race Across America, his hands were so swollen that he couldn't hold a key, and as a result of sleep deprivation he was prone to violent outbursts of paranoia and terrifying hallucinations. Towards the end of the Race Across America, he was known to weep uncontrollably and was seen hopping off his bike to fight imaginary assailants – bears, wolves or aliens – which turned out to be mailboxes. He imagined that cracks in the road were coded messages, and on one occasion became convinced he was being pursued by the Mujahedeen on horseback; his support team encouraged him to ride faster, pretending that they could see them too. "Sometimes during races he gets off his bike and walks towards us in the follow car, very angry," recalled a team member in 2006. "We lock the doors." Another team member said: "He was very polite and nice when he was not on the bike. During races, he was absolutely the most unpleasant person you could imagine."
Jure Robic, extreme cyclist, born Jesenice, Slovenia, 10 April 1965; died in a collision with a car near Jesenice, 24 Sept 2010, aged 45.

FOR MORE STRANGE DEATHS GO TO:
www.forteantimes.com/strangedays/strangedeaths

Strange deaths

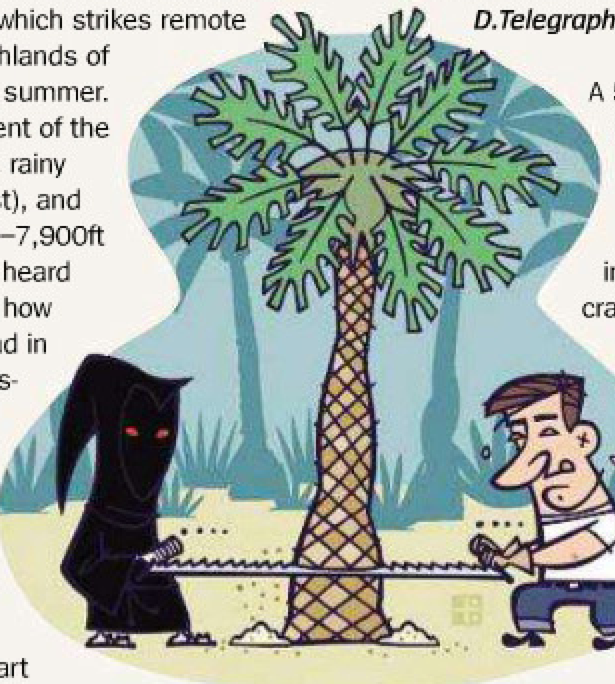
UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

A FIVE-YEAR STUDY HAS BLAMED AN innocuous-looking mushroom known as Little White for many mysterious deaths in south-western China. No one knew what caused Yunnan Sudden Death Syndrome, blamed for an estimated 400 deaths in the past three decades. However, an investigative team from China's Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced that Little White is responsible for the baffling condition, which strikes remote villages in the rural highlands of Yunnan province every summer.

More than 90 per cent of the deaths occurred in the rainy season (June to August), and at an altitude of 5,900–7,900ft (1,800–2,400m). "We heard amazing stories about how people would drop dead in the middle of a conversation," said Zhang Shu, a cardiologist who took part in the CDC study. "About two-thirds of victims, in the hours before death, experienced symptoms such as heart palpitation, nausea, dizziness, seizures and fatigue."

The investigation was initially hampered by language barriers and the remote location of the villages. However, in 2008, the scientists noted that the Little White mushroom was often found in the homes of the people who died. Yunnan province is well known for its wild mushrooms, many of which are exported at high prices. Families, who make their living by collecting and selling fungi, eat the Little White as it has no commercial value – it is too small and turns brown shortly after being picked. The mushroom belongs to the *Trogia* genus and has three toxic amino acids (which are not used in proteins); the scientists conjectured that these became lethal when consumed with barium, a heavy metal found in high concentrations in the local water supply. A campaign to warn people against eating the tiny mushrooms has dramatically reduced the number of deaths. *[AP] BBC News, 14 July 2010.*

SIX JAPANESE PEOPLE CHOKED TO DEATH AND five others were in a serious condition after eating traditional mochi rice cakes to celebrate the New Year. The victims, all from Tokyo and aged over 70, died of suffocation after eating the glutinous delicacy. During New Year, one of Japan's biggest holidays, families traditionally cook ozouni soup and put sticky rice cakes in the broth, which regularly cause fatalities – for instance, three pensioners choked to death during the festivities in January 2007. *D.Record, 3 Jan 2007; (Sydney) D.Telegraph, 4 Jan 2011.*



TERRY COLON

A 50-YEAR-OLD MAN WAS killed on 3 December while cutting down a large foxtail palm tree in his garden at Knuckey Lagoon near Darwin in Australia. The tree came crashing down, striking him in the face. Another freak accident killed a 45-year-old man from Ludmilla, Northern Territory, on 17 December 2006. He had been cutting down 8m (26ft) Carpentaria palms in his yard when a branch fell on overhead power lines. He was apparently electrocuted when he touched the power line while trying to remove the branch. *ntnews.com, 8 Dec 2010.*

A NEW MOTHER WHO DIED SECONDS AFTER giving birth was suffering from a condition so rare none of her doctors had encountered it before. Julie Walsh, 28, died having suffered an amniotic fluid embolism, in which fluid surrounding her son in the womb entered her blood stream and caused an allergic reaction. *D.Telegraph, 4 Nov 2010.*

AN INDIAN MYSTIC ALLEGEDLY KIDNAPPED, beheaded and drank the blood of a toddler in a bid to obtain supernatural powers. Abdul Gafoor, 31, told police he was instructed to do this in a dream. He abducted the 18-month-old boy from a Sufi shrine, where the child's widowed mother was staying in Madurai, an ancient city near the southern tip of the Indian subcontinent. Gafoor and his female associate, Ramala Beevi, 28, then took the child to a lodge in a nearby city, where Gafoor cut his throat. *MX News (Sydney), 26 July 2010.*

the UFO files

FORTEAN TIMES presents our monthly section featuring regular sighting reports, reviews of classic cases, entries on major ufological topics and hands-on advice for UFO investigators. **The UFO Files** will benefit from your input, so don't hesitate to submit your suggestions and questions.

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FLYINGSAUCERY

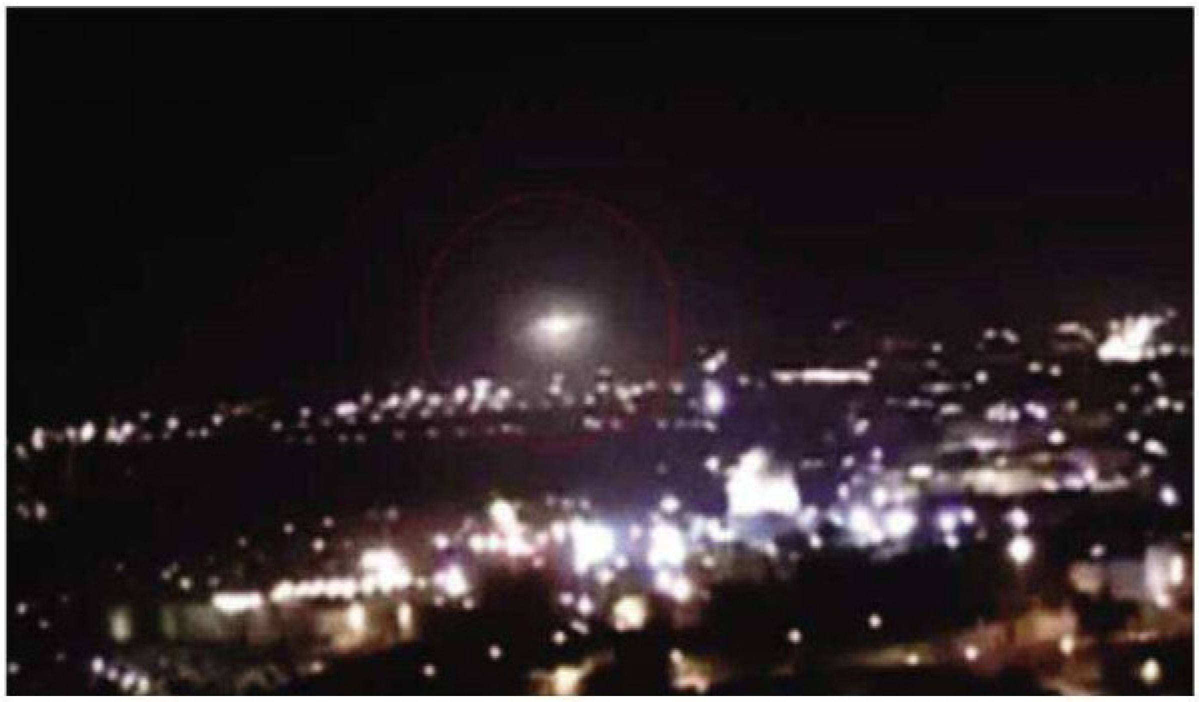
ANDY ROBERTS & DR DAVID CLARKE PRESENT THEIR REGULAR SURVEY OF THE LATEST FADS AND FLAPS FROM THE WORLD OF UFOLOGY

JERUSALEM UFO HOAX?

Footage posted on YouTube seeming to show a glowing orb of light hovering over Jerusalem's iconic Dome of the Rock led the more excitable tabloids to proclaim the "final proof that aliens exist" had arrived. But seasoned UFO footage watchers smelled a rat. In his caption, the photographer claimed he and another man "witnessed an amazing UFO aircraft over Jerusalem old city" from a panoramic viewpoint near Mount Zion in the early hours of 28 January. The dramatic footage shows the 'UFO' descending slowly to ground level and hovering briefly. In one clip, a group of American tourists can be heard saying: "We've seen them in Mississippi like this", while others gasp in astonishment as the UFO zooms upwards into the sky. Two more mobile phone clips were added later, uploaded (it was claimed), by groups of independent witnesses who saw the same spectacular event from other parts of the city. The rock is the site where Muslims believe Mohammad ascended to heaven with the archangel Gabriel and the foundation stone is the holiest site in Judaism. Within hours, the images went viral and the Net buzzed with possibilities: was this proof that aliens are visiting our holy sites? Was it a visit from an angel, a signal from the Hebrew god or "a great deception sent by Satan"? Or was it all just the latest hoax created by the UFO footage cottage industry to fool a credulous media and public? We thought it odd that despite the appearance of at least three separate clips, no named person was quoted in the reports. Jerusalem has a population of 7.5 million people. If a UFO really had hovered above the Dome of the Rock, even at 1am, there should have been thousands of witnesses, not just a handful. The story and footage were simply too good to be true. And they didn't fool YouTube user 'Hoaxkiller', whose research revealed the 'UFO' was a computer-generated image. He even created alternative versions to show how it was done. According to him, the hoaxers used a real video of the rock as their canvas, then added the fake UFO, followed by CGI-generated camera-shake and fake zoom "so it would be more believable". *D.Mail, Sun, 3 Feb 2011; Hoaxkiller: http://bit.ly/fNL30r (YouTube).*

BERRY INTERESTING

When forester Bob Taylor went to work in Dechmont Wood near Livingston in Scotland on a cold November morning in 1979, he had no idea he was to have an experience that would forever enshrine him in the annals of ufology (**FT31:30**; **56:48–49**; **60:63**; **64:9**; **189:29**; obit. **223:26**). Taylor encountered a large sphere hovering between the forest floor and the tops of the trees. He noted what might have been portholes above a flange that divided the dome, but was unable to identify what he was observing. As he watched, two smaller spheres detached themselves from the object and rolled toward him. Taylor could see the spheres, hear the sound as their spines touched the floor and was conscious of "a strong pungent smell that was overpowering". He felt the spheres grip him and drag him toward the object, after which he passed out, coming to sometime later, disorientated and with torn trousers. No explanation was ever found to account for this somewhat atypical UFO encounter. But David Slater's excellent "Musings on Anomalous Culture" blog has suggested a possible cause for Taylor's bizarre experience. He notes that Deadly Nightshade (Belladonna) is indigenous to the area, the berries of which contain atropine, a poison that can dramatically affect the body's central nervous system in a number of ways, with perceptual distortions and hallucinations being common. Is it possible that Taylor naïvely picked and ate some of the tasty-looking berries, or even just touched or crushed them? Slater's theory is highly speculative, but all the elements for it exist in known reality – unlike flying saucers, for which there is as yet no evidence. Slater's detailed exploration of the case can be found at: http://bit.ly/dQa9fh (anomalousculture.blogspot.com).



ALIENS ATE MY PANTIES

Alien abductions once took centre stage in ufology. Two decades ago, the stories spun by the likes of Budd Hopkins, David Jacobs and Whitley Strieber enthralled people in their thousands at conferences, with book sales to match. Now Carol Rainey, Hopkins's ex-wife, is speaking out about her "perceptions of some researchers' ethical violations, misuse of human subjects, and their steady manipulation of the abduction narrative into a rigid doctrine". "The Priests of High Strangeness" is a hard-hitting article in which Rainey argues that "the powerful evidence" for alien abductions and hybrids among us is based mainly on the abductologists' hypnotic repetition of their own proclamations and a credulous public which believes whatever unfounded theories these celebrity paranormal investigators put out. According to Rainey, one victim was asked by Jacobs to "send him her panties, unwashed, so they could be tested for alien sperm" and a proposal that she wear a chastity belt which he'd locate for her from (in Jacobs's words, allegedly): "a sex shop that specialised in bondage/dominance, a place that I frequented quite often". Gulp! Rainey is preparing a documentary promising further revelations about Hopkins's investigation of the famous Linda Cortile abduction story. Meanwhile, veteran British ufologist Philip Mantle is planning an alien abduction-themed conference in West Yorkshire on 15–16 October, featuring Travis Walton and Kathleen Marden, niece of the late Betty Hill. http://bit.ly/h0mG9i (paratopia.net); http://bit.ly/eoRKLL (carolrainey.com).

UFO CASEBOOK

JENNY RANDLES TRACES THE LINKS BETWEEN MYSTERIOUS BUZZING NOISES AND UFOS

AERIAL BUZZES AND HUMMING HILLS

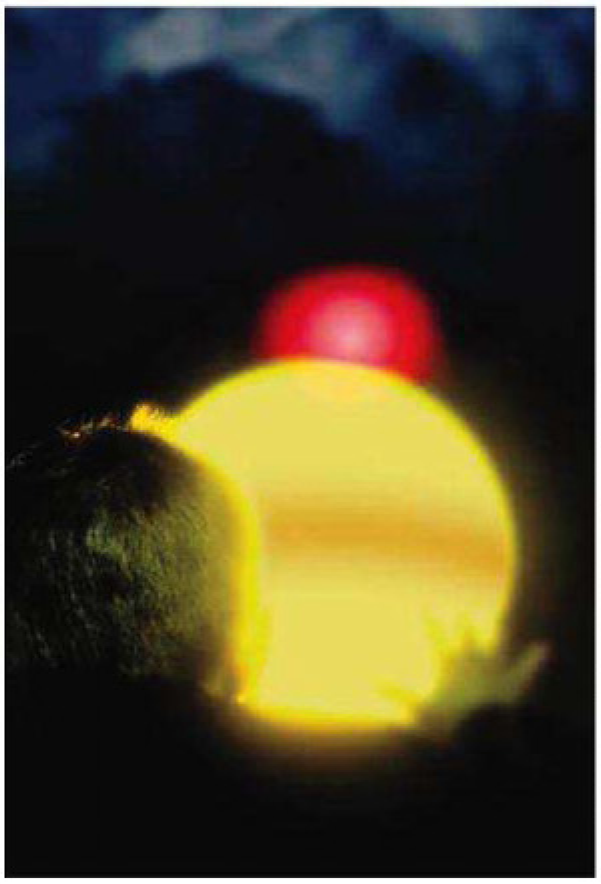
One of the earliest cases of 'humming' that grabbed my attention occurred during the early hours of 5 October 1967, amidst a UK-wide UFO flap. It involved a strange noise captured on a battered old tape recorder near the Cheshire village of Hough Green. The "Hough Green Sound" was a weird combination of whirring, buzzing, grinding and a semi-comical incident where someone jumped into a hedge to escape the racket caused by this floating auditory apparition. Any connection with UFOs was debateable, but the story was quickly linked with 'spaceships' and triggered my first awareness that UFOs and the wider field of forteana are interlinked.

When I heard the recording, I registered another possible connection with the oddity, called the 'Humadruzz' and well known in the south Manchester suburbs where I grew up, – a phenomenon combining humming, droning and buzzing (see **FT65:12**; **71:12**; **85:13**; **162:26–27**; **242: 17**).

Just a few months beforehand, a family friend from Didsbury had reported her own encounter with this weird sound – she described a buzzing "like a swarm of rampant bees". This part of Manchester had similar reports back in 1878, when a media debate coined the term 'Humadruzz'. Speculation ranged from the rational (new Victorian technology such as underground water pipes) to the absurd (an invasion from an unknown race living beneath the Earth). A century later, the sensible ideas were represented by hi tech such as microwave radiation and more 'imaginative' theories were built around a UFO invasion. *Plus ça change*, as they say.

Many UFO sightings refer to this same humming/buzzing noise accompanying flying objects. I had noticed this overlap, and a case on 5 January 1975 brought it into focus. A group of children were playing at dusk by a bridge in Uppermill near Oldham, Lancashire. Suddenly, a yellow globe appeared, reflecting down onto the stonework. It had a red light on top and a rotating band of orange in the middle. As it moved away over the Pennines, it emitted a humming/buzzing noise that scared the witnesses. Luckily, one of their fathers was an electrical engineer and had the foresight to do an experiment. His research with varying tones played to the witnesses found that the closest match was from a generator operating at about 100hz. This case (like the Hough Green sound) happened amidst a major local wave of UFO sightings and at a spot where close encounters were prevalent.

As scientists began to take reports of the humadruzz more seriously, this experiment was replicated. An outbreak in Taos, New Mexico, in the mid-1990s resulted in the local university audio specialist James Kelly testing several witnesses with various sounds. He found two associated waves – a low one below the threshold of many people's hearing at 17–33hz and a penetrating one at above 125hz – and suggested a mixture of these sounds might create the unusual droning and buzzing that witnesses described.



Security guards hid under a table to avoid the "hum"

The pattern was emphasised by a 1977 case involving two security guards at a site also on the banks of the Mersey, at Moore, Cheshire. They heard the penetrating humming/buzzing noise in the early hours, and saw a blinding white light accompanying it. Terrified, they hid under a table until rescued by head office and driven home, still shaking, by the boss. Meanwhile, the replacement guards found a strange white powder – seemingly ice crystals – despite very clement weather, right where the hovering, buzzing glow had appeared.

From such evidence, it seems reasonable to propose some kind of atmospheric phenomenon exists that emits the hum but also glows when seen in the dark, where it is commonly interpreted as a 'UFO'. This might even effect the ambient environment, producing physical effects such as ice particles via atmospheric changes.

Then there are the daytime encounters, where nothing is seen in the sky, typically witnessed by someone walking in the country in warm weather and where the sound appears to emerge from within the ground itself. One report came from Winster, Derbyshire, where a walker reported that the hum built up over time: "as if the hillside itself was vibrating… a pleasant humming like an orchestra tuning up but on one note". She suggested that the cause was a vibration within the crystalline structure of the rocks forming a ridge. In such cases, I have found the 'humming hills' were in locations with strong traditions of fortean phenomena. White Wells on Ilkley Moor in Yorkshire is an example where timeslips, goblins, poltergeists and more recently UFOs and aliens have been reported. Even the names given to local places in such spots reflect such supernatural associations – such as 'Fairy Kirk', where from Saxon times legend said a church was left unfinished after rocks were moved by mysterious forces attributed to demons. The hum has been reported there since 1878. One witness in 1984 described how "suddenly the air was filled by a sound suggestive of an enormous number of bees in full flight". It came from all around the hill and then stopped dead. Nothing was seen.

The consistency in these reports is remarkable. When researching on the Isle of Man in 2002, I heard similar accounts in several places. At Glen Rushen in June 1978, two holidaymakers heard "a beautiful humming sound like thousands of bees buzzing in unison". This spot is long reputed by Manx folklore to be a home of the indigenous fairy folk. Other sites around the island feature these sounds and witnesses being 'translocated' – physically moved by unseen forces from one place to another.

Today, of course, such experiences are still reported, but in the context of alien abductions – often in areas where the humming sounds are heard. This clearly implies some sort of connection.

In the 1990s, Maurice Giffin, an electrical engineer from Barmouth, North Wales, discovered a humming hill while walking near Tal-y-bont. Giffin traced a circular area where a charged energy appeared around certain hills and penetrated into the atmosphere. It had a radius of about 100ft (30m) and no visible source. He concluded that it was a floating energy field. It was common in hot stable weather between May and September, when in optimum conditions the field could extend as far as 1,000ft (300m). These findings match practically all the reports in my database. The engineer suspected this floating charge was focused into humming hot spots by local geology.

Unsurprisingly, the Welsh humming hills also have a history of fortean activity, including floating lights reported a century ago.

These clues offer a possible cause for a whole array of strange phenomena. Perhaps the humming hills, droning sounds in the night, strange atmospheric changes, translocations, glowing lights and modern buzzing UFOs all emerge from a natural energy within the atmosphere, charged and channelled via geography and climate. Such 'haunted' spots seem to become intermittently active and over the ages attract an aura steeped with the supernatural.

The Quest for Otto Rahn

Part One: Crusade against the Grail

Who was the mystery man who caused Heinrich Himmler's team of crack SS archæologists to seek the Holy Grail and other legendary relics? In the first of two articles, **RICHARD STANLEY** investigates the life of SS Obersturmführer Otto Rahn. Main illustration by **GÉRARD GOFFAUX**.

Berlin between the wars was a city known throughout Europe for its bohemian subculture of young intellectuals. Amongst the personalities who hotly debated the many modernist "isms" that were fracturing the old ideological certainties which had glued together the 19th century, few individuals were more colourful than a dark-haired, green-eyed young man named Otto Wilhelm Rahn. His gaunt figure, swathed in characteristic black coat and fedora, casts a long shadow out of those twilight years, a 'great silhouette' around which the most extravagant myths accrued. He was variously said to be a Mason, a Rosicrucian, a Luciferian, an agent of the Thule Gesellschaft, an initiated Cathar and even the leader of an obscure, international secret society. As author Phillip Kerr puts it, Rahn's contemporaries might not have been surprised to see "the Scarlet Woman and the Great Beast come flying out of the front door" of his apartment on Tiergartenstrasse. One of his Nazi peers in Heinrich Himmler's Black Order remarked in an internal memo that he "half suspected Rahn of being in league with the little people". To this day, it is widely believed that this enigmatic young man knew the whereabouts of one of the most sacred relics in all Christendom – the Most High Holy Grail. But the truth is stranger still…

Otto Rahn's gaunt figure, swathed in black coat and fedora, casts a long shadow...

"MY ANCESTORS ARE WITCHES AND I AM A HERETIC"

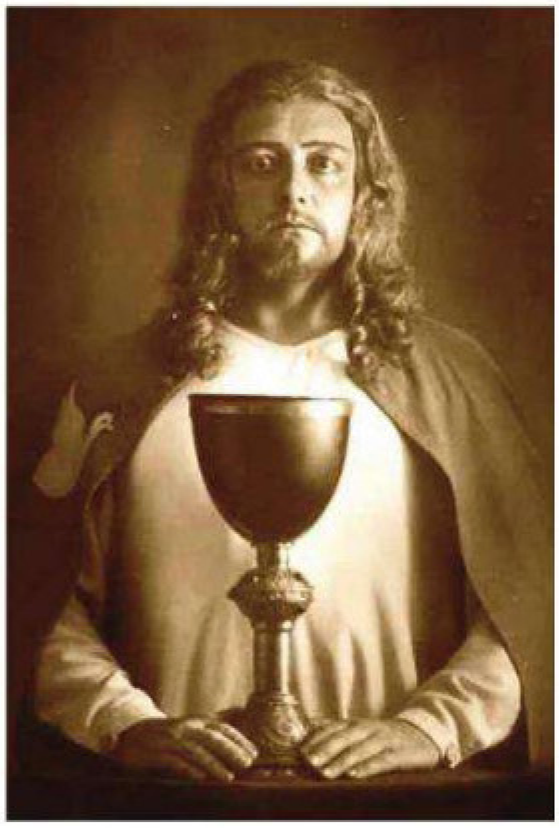
It is no accident that I have come to be the caretaker of SS Obersturmführer Otto Wilhelm Rahn's memory. Some years ago, I was commissioned by the documentary department of a major British television station to research the back-story behind Stephen Spielberg's *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, to see if it had any basis in historical fact. I was packed off to Europe to track down any surviving archæologists who had been in the pay of Himmler's Ahnenerbe SS in the hope of obtaining interviews, and perhaps getting to the bottom of whatever the hell it was they thought they were looking for – Ark, Grail, Spear or otherwise. (The 'Ahnenerbe Forschungs und Lehrgemeinschaft' in full, or Ancestral Heritage Research and Training Foundation; see **FT175:30–39** and **FT196:32–39** for more on the Ahnenerbe's activities).

I wanted to interview Otto Rahn, whom I believed at the time might still be alive. His name came up again and again, his spectre leading

GOFF.

ADAM T. BAKER

ABOVE: The Cathar fortress of Montségur, which Otto Rahn linked with Montsalvache, the Grail castle of Wolfram van Eschencach's 13th-century *Parzival*.
BELOW: The Grail mythos was popularised by Wagner's operas; here, Carl Clewing plays the titular hero of Wagner's *Parsifal* at Bayreuth in 1924.



me from France to Germany to Iceland and back, seemingly always one step ahead of me. In the time-warped Cathar stronghold of Montségur in the French Pyrenees (**FT266:56–57**), the former mayor, Marius Mounie, told me that Otto was an old man now but still visited the area often.

I slept in Otto's bed at Madame Couquet's auberge; and later, at his niece's house deep in the Black Forest, I came across the elusive Obersturmführer's discarded teddy bear. The problem was that if Otto wasn't exactly alive then he wasn't, strictly speaking, dead either. There was no death certificate, no formal paperwork that could lay his ghost or put the seal on his baffling legacy.

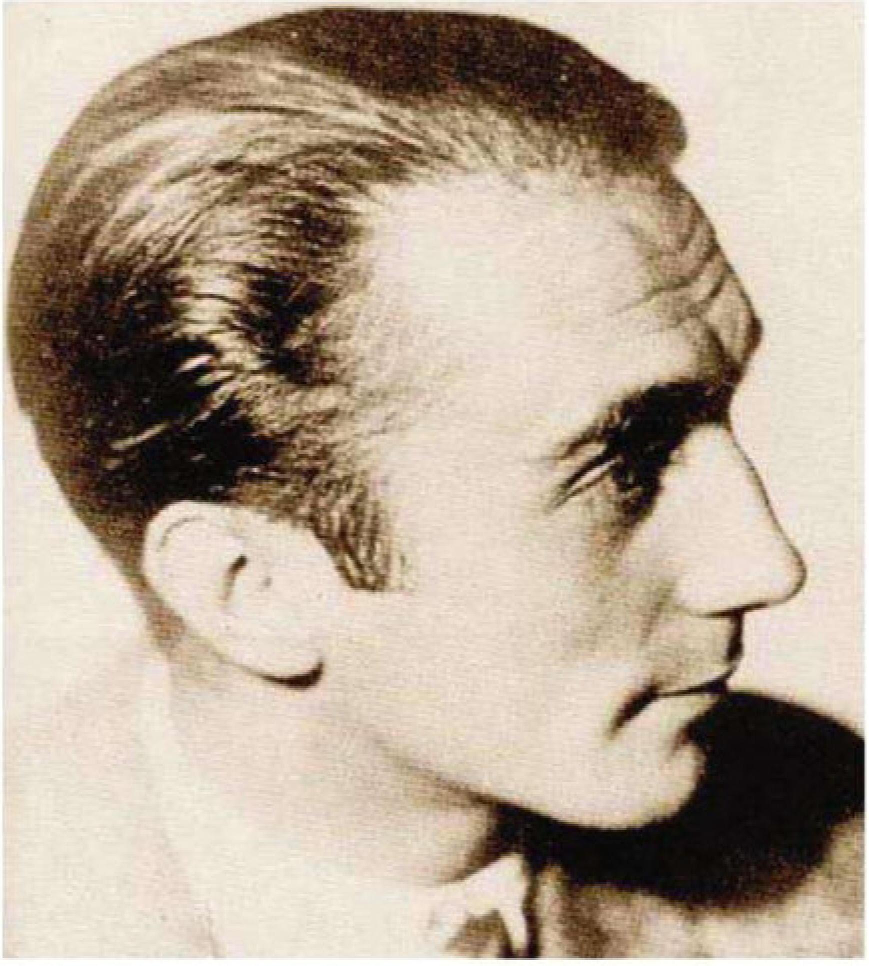
The only certainty was that he was born on 18 February 1904 in the small town of Michelstadt in Hesse, southern Germany. His childhood appears to have been far from normal. Rejected by his mother and bereaved by the death of his older brother Rudolph, Otto grew into a solitary, introverted boy who assimilated the bare bones of German Romanticism through his avid childhood reading, which included Greek, Roman and Nordic mythology. It must have been hard for him to fit in at school, as his father, Karl, was a magistrate who was often transferred from town to town, making it difficult for Otto to form lasting friendships. His niece, the psychiatrist Ingheborg Rhoemer-Rahn, told me that Otto had inherited 'second sight' from his father who, after going blind in later life, grew increasingly convinced that he could "see heaven" or "talk to angels".

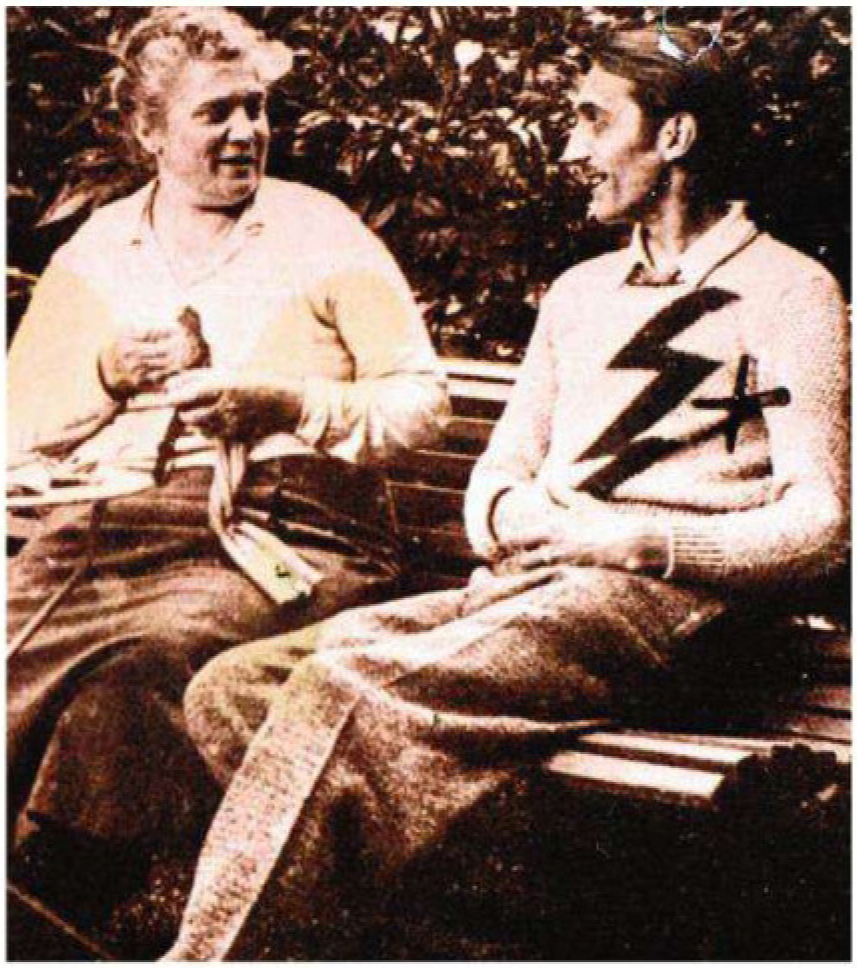
Otto's generalised affinity with Romanticism became an all-consuming passion for the stories of Parsifal, Lohengrin, the Nibelungenlied and the tales of Jacob and Benjamin Grimm, fellow denizens of the Black Forest, whom he saw as role models in his chosen career as philologist and folklorist. While attending the University of Giessen he was encouraged by his professor, Freiherr Von Gall, to focus his studies on the history of the Cathars, the events of the Albigensian crusade and the massacre that occurred at Montségur in 1244, effectively putting an end to the Gnostic tradition in southern Europe. Rahn is quoted as saying that "My ancestors are witches and I am a heretic… It was a subject that completely captivated me".

Otto was further inspired by the work of archæologist Heinrich Schliemann, whose theory that Homer's *Iliad* reflected actual historical events led to his sensational 'discovery' of the ruins of Troy. Otto dreamed of achieving similar results by proving that there was a factual basis to Wolfram von Eschenbach's epic narrative poem *Parzival*, a 13th-century re-creation of the story of the Holy Grail that had been left unfinished by Chrétien de Troyes. Interest in this chivalric romance had been revived in the 19th century by Wagner's operas, and Otto set out to write a dissertation on Master Kiot, the Languedocian troubadour whose long-lost Grail ballads were said to have inspired Wolfram's masterpiece.

Otto believed that the Cathars had been in possession of a sacred relic, described variously as a cup, a bowl, a plate, a book, or a hard, dark stone possessed of an extraordinary magical virtue. According to Wolfram's text, whoever possessed the Grail or came into contact with the relic "would have eternal life and would be healed". Otto was convinced that the secret of the Grail had been lost when the last of the Cathar *parfaits* had died on the orders of the Pope and the King of France. He sought to establish a direct link between Montsalvache, the Grail castle of Parzival, and the Cathar fortress of Montségur, scene of one of the Albigensian crusade's most protracted sieges.

He observed that the culture of the mediæval Cathars bore a strong





ABOVE LEFT: Otto in the 1930s. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Otto sporting the 'sieg' rune sweater his mother (left) knitted for him. Was he linked to the Thule Society?
BELOW: The Polaires were a secret society of quais-Masonic esotericists with whom Otto became involved during his years in the South of France.

resemblance to that of the ancient Druids, and believed that their secret wisdom might have been preserved by the troubadours, or *minnesingers* – the travelling poets and minstrels of mediæval Europe. According to Otto, the war of the Roman Catholic Church against the Albigensians was simply a material manifestation of the ongoing apocalyptic struggle between the forces of Light and Darkness upon whose violent interaction everything in our illusory material Universe was predicated. Infinite goodness, the Cathar *parfaits* reasoned, was incapable of creating evil, hence the darkness, pain and misery in our world was not the will of God, but the work of the Devil, the demiurge who had hijacked creation and whom they referred to as 'Rex Mundi', the ruler of the transient, material world. They identified all clerical and secular rulers – principally the Catholic Church – as the personification of this Darkness and believed that it was possible through a form of direct initiation known as the *consolamentum*, or multiple incarnations, to eventually escape from the cycle of time and the deterministic prison of the material world, to literally return to the stars and the domain of the true, good God.

BULLETIN

DES

POLAIRES

Prix: 1.80 N°1 9 Mai 1930

"A PRISONER OF THE FORCES OF EVIL"

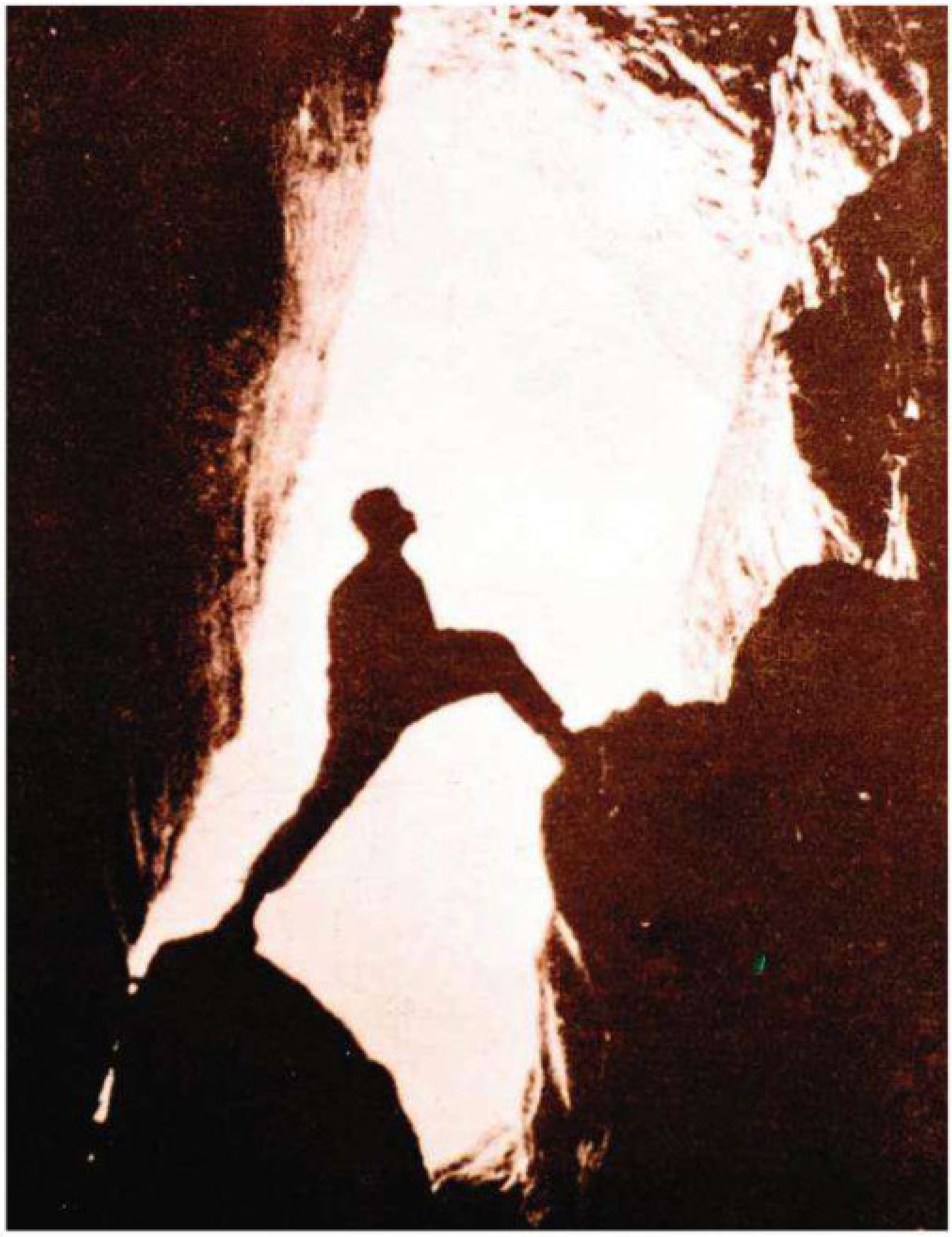
Otto Rahn first visited France, where he hoped to continue his increasingly obsessive research, in 1929. During a lengthy stay in Paris, he came into contact with the poet Maurice Magre, a grand historian of the Pyrenees who had already written several books about the crusade against the south, including *The Treasure of the Albigensians* and *The Blood of Toulouse*. Magre was a member of a quasi-Masonic secret society known as the *Polaires*, an esoteric circle whose members believed they were acting under the direct instruction of the 'ascended masters', the 'secret rulers of the world' with whom they were supposedly able to communicate via a numerical oracle known as the *Oracle de Force Astrale*. Through this secret society, Otto was introduced to a mysterious Countess, Miriam de Pujol-Murat, who apparently believed herself to be the direct descendent, if not the living reincarnation, of the 'white lady' of Montségur, the castle's immortal chatelaine, Esclarmonde de Foix, a historic figure whom Rahn equates in his first book with the guardian of the Grail.

They believed they acted under instruction from the secret rulers of the world

The Countess became both a friend and a patron to young Otto, allowing him access to her private library and the use of her car and chauffeur during his initial tour of the Languedoc. During his time in Montségur, where he lodged in a house belonging to the village priest, Otto came into contact with several key figures in the neo-Cathar revival, including his translator, René Nelli, who would later found the Centre for Cathar Studies (Centre d'études Cathare) in Carcassonne, as well as Rudolph Steiner's principal disciple, Deodat Roche, who played an instrumental role in disseminating the Anthroposophical Society's teachings in the South of France. Otto's attempts to buy land in the area, on a site overlooking the ruins of the heretic citadel, were thwarted by the locals, who effectively closed ranks against him. The memory of World War I was still too fresh for the Montségurians to admit a German into their tiny, insular community and there was, perhaps, something vaguely sinister about Otto's manner that failed to inspire their trust. A difference of opinion with Magre and Roche seems to have led to Otto's abrupt departure from the isolated Cathar enclave, and in the spring of 1932 he relocated to the crumbling spa town of Ussat-les-Bains, where he took over the lease on a small hotel that was to become his base of operations in the area.

Rahn's research took several years, during which time he travelled widely and took hundreds of photographs although, curiously, there is no evidence that he had any visible means of support during this period. His family was middle class at best and thoroughly incapable of underwriting Otto’s extravagant lifestyle, leading one to the inescapable conclusion that Otto must have been on the payroll of some undisclosed organisation or private benefactor. A possible clue to the source of his largesse might be found in the jumper that Otto frequently wore at the time, knitted by his mother and emblazoned with a prominent double ‘sieg’ rune, known to be one of the symbols of the Thule Society. It has been supposed that Rahn was in fact dispatched to the South of France on a secret mission to infiltrate the neo-Cathar movement and turn it towards the fledgling Nazi cause.

“Besides, he was apparently haunted by demons”, Madame Suzie Nelli, the widow of Otto’s translator, told me. “Sometimes when he was alone he would cry out. He had presences – things like that. For me he was a little like the Antichrist. A prisoner of the forces of evil…”

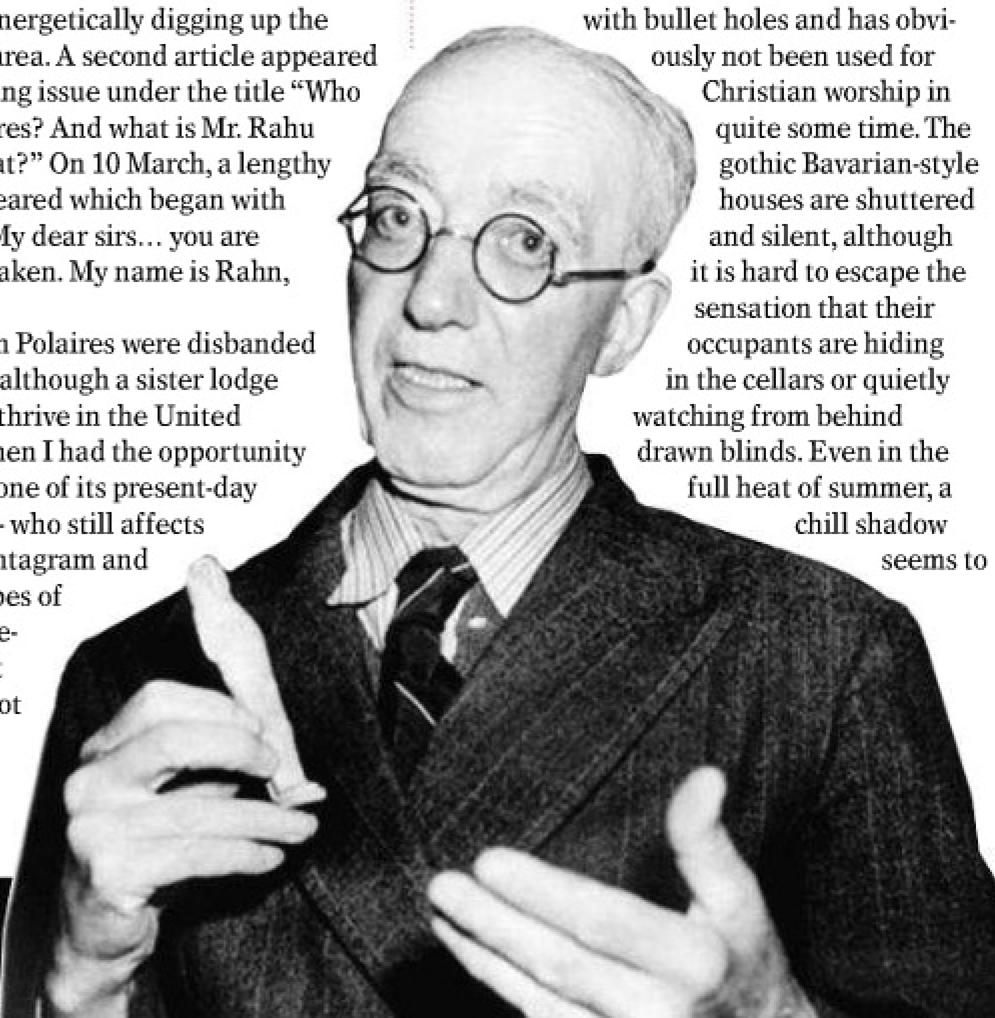


LEFT: Otto in the Cave of the Hermit, 1932.

BELOW: Antonin Gadal, self-proclaimed patriarch of the modern Cathars.

It is unclear whether or not Otto was formally initiated into the Polaires, who were actively conducting a series of ‘archæological’ digs on the Countess’s property at the Château of Lordat, in the hope of uncovering the lost Gnostic gospel of Saint John or even the tomb of Christian Rosenkreutz, the apocryphal founder of the Rosicrucian Order. On 6 March 1932, an article appeared in a local newspaper, *La Dépêche*, under the heading “Is this a modern gold rush?” and claiming that a shadowy international secret society under the direction of a German individual named ‘Rams’ was energetically digging up the caves in the area. A second article appeared in the following issue under the title “Who are the Polaires? And what is Mr. Rahu doing in Ussat?” On 10 March, a lengthy rebuttal appeared which began with the words: “My dear sirs… you are entirely mistaken. My name is Rahn, not Rams…”

The French Polaires were disbanded in the 1960s, although a sister lodge continues to thrive in the United Kingdom. When I had the opportunity to interview one of its present-day high priests – who still affects the silver pentagram and turquoise robes of his Gallic forebears – about whether or not Otto Rahn had been one of the organisation’s former leaders, he was evasive, insisting that all record of the lodge’s early membership had been lost during the war. Something in the priest’s manner – the momentary flash of fear in his eyes at the mention of Otto’s name – indicated that this was somewhat less than the whole truth…



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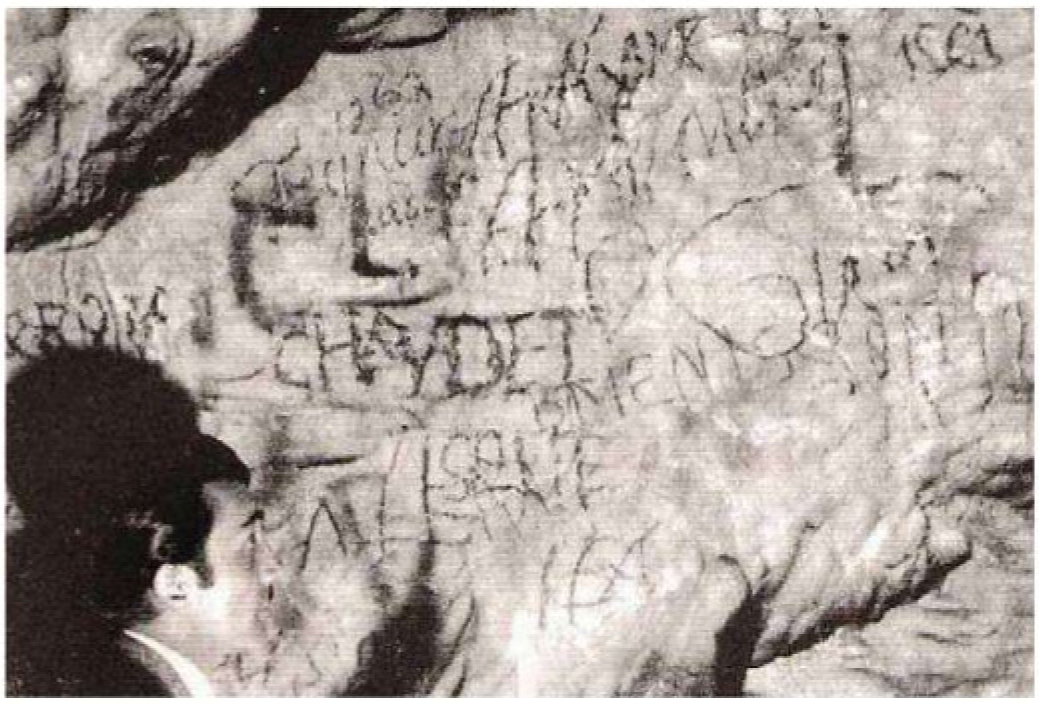
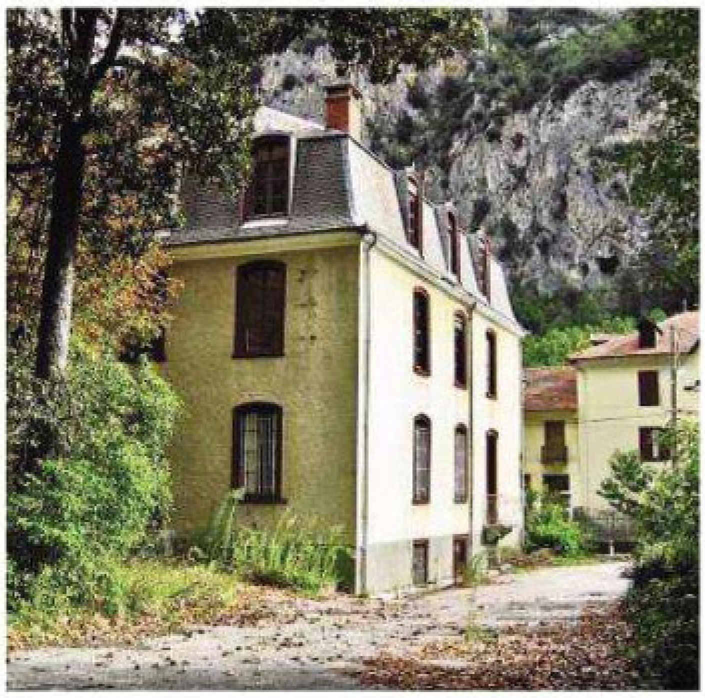
THE BLEEDING STONES

Modern-day Ussat-les-Bains is eerily reminiscent of Stephen King’s fictional town of Salem’s Lot. The church is pockmarked with bullet holes and has obviously not been used for Christian worship in quite some time. The gothic Bavarian-style houses are shuttered and silent, although it is hard to escape the sensation that their occupants are hiding in the cellars or quietly watching from behind drawn blinds. Even in the full heat of summer, a chill shadow seems to hang over this narrow valley. The area is one of the largest limestone regions in Europe and Otto based himself here in order to explore and excavate the caverns that honeycomb the surrounding mountains.

His plans brought him into contact with Antonin Gadal, the minister of tourism for the area and self-proclaimed patriarch of the neo-Cathars. Gadal claimed to have been the recipient of an oral tradition passed down to him by an old, blind man named Adolphe ‘Papa’ Garigou, whom he had taken care of in his youth. Gadal believed that the nearby caves had played an important initiatory role in the mediæval Cathar faith and that their lightless galleries still hid their lost treasure – possibly even the Holy Grail itself, which, according to popular tradition, had been smuggled out of Montségur shortly before the castle’s fall. Otto found in Gadal a kindred spirit under whose patronage he was able to carry his investigations to their logical conclusion.

There are countless rumours concerning Otto’s activities during this period. He was accompanied by a sizable entourage, including a “woman from Paris who wore too much make-up”, a mysterious individual known as “Mr Baby” and a 7ft (2m)-tall Somali bartender-turned-bodyguard named Habdu, who saved Otto’s life after they became trapped by rising flood waters in the grotto of Fontanet, a location of particular significance to Rahn’s ongoing research. It was here that Otto and Gadal uncovered a cache of meteorites associated with the ancient worship of Cybele, or Kubaba, the mountain mother, and closely linked with both the black stone of the Kaaba and the “hard, dark stone” described in Wolfram von Eschenbach’s text. These hyper-dense extraterrestrial artefacts, known to the ancients as “Lapis Excoercis” or “Lapis Exilis”, never seem to rust or tarnish; when agitated, their surface ‘bleeds’ a bright red ferrous solution, 99 per cent pure iron and said to possess a quasi-magical healing virtue. Gadal described these magnetic stones as the “Graal Pyrenean” and after the war, when he assumed leadership of the European Rosicrucian movement, he had the largest of the meteorites removed to the Netherlands, where it currently serves as an





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ABOVE: Otto in the grotto – examining supposed Cathar graffiti in the Grotte de Lombrives. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The Hotel des Marroniers, the hotel which Otto rented as a base during his time in Ussat-les-Bains. **BELOW:** Although an old friend of Otto's identified him in this photo, forming a pentagram in Ussat's Bethlehem Grotto, it would seem that the man in the photograph is Karl Rinderknecht, one of neo-Cathar Antonin Gadal's Rosicrucian followers. But why the deception?

altar in their temple in Amsterdam.

It is hard to know what Otto and his mentor really found in those caves, and entry to the Grotto of Fontanet remains barred to this day by a locked gate. Gadal himself is hardly the most credible of witnesses, having been caught red-handed a few years later burying jade ornaments purchased at a museum auction, apparently to shore up his theories of a direct link between the Cathars and the science and sorcery of ancient Egypt. Otto denies having had anything to do with Gadal, claiming in his book to have explored the caves alone, accompanied only by his faithful cat, although surviving correspondence clearly indicates a close relationship between the two men.

Otto must have attached a great deal of importance to the graffiti he found lining the cave walls, taking dozens of photographs, many of them still in his niece's possession, each one neatly labelled in the vanished Obersturmführer's own wilting handwriting. He seemed to have believed that the Cathars and the Templars shared hiding places and that these scrawled sigils proved an obscure linkage between them, a connection apparently vital to the ancient lineage of the modern-day Freemasons. Some think that it was really Otto and Gadal who secretly tagged the cave walls with crudely rendered designer esoterica. Joseph Mandemant, the leader of a local historical society, insisted that he had caught Otto in the act, scribbling the "face of Beatrice" in the centre of a curious octagonal depression found on the wall of the Bethlehem Grotto, a cavern in Ussat named after the ray of light that falls on a natural stone altar on 25 December every year. Mandemant claims to have hauled the young German out of the cave by the scruff of his neck and "thrown his crayons after him".

> **Otto claimed to have explored the caves alone, accompanied only by his faithful cat**

THE MAN IN THE PHOTOGRAPH

In 1932, Otto Rahn left the South of France in a hurry, dogged by rumours of financial problems and possible legal proceedings against him. For a while, his movements are all but impossible to track. Evidently, he did not depart the country immediately, for in October of that year the author Isabelle Sandy mentions in a letter that Otto is staying with her in Paris and that "A valuable treasure has been returned to us, without diplomats and without fuss and that is the result of an incomparable success."

One of Otto's few surviving companions from the period was Professor Paul Alexis Ladame, journalist, radio man and former lecturer at Geneva University on the "methodology of information and disinformation". The Sun was already setting over Lake Geneva and the cluttered office shelving off into shadow when we first spoke in 1998. Paul's voice was a hoarse whisper, his face almost lost in the gathering gloom. He had recently had his left foot amputated, and in a cruel twist of fate a routine tracheotomy had severed all but one of his vocal chords. I was eager to speak to him nonetheless and, fortunately, he seemed equally keen to unburden himself.

"That was my friend… Otto Rahn…"

Paul pushed a faded photograph across the tabletop. A young man with dark hair, approximately my own age, standing in the octagonal depression above the altar in the grotto of Ussat, arms outstretched to form a pentagram.

"Gadal took this picture, back in '33. It was his initiation."

"What about Beatrice?"

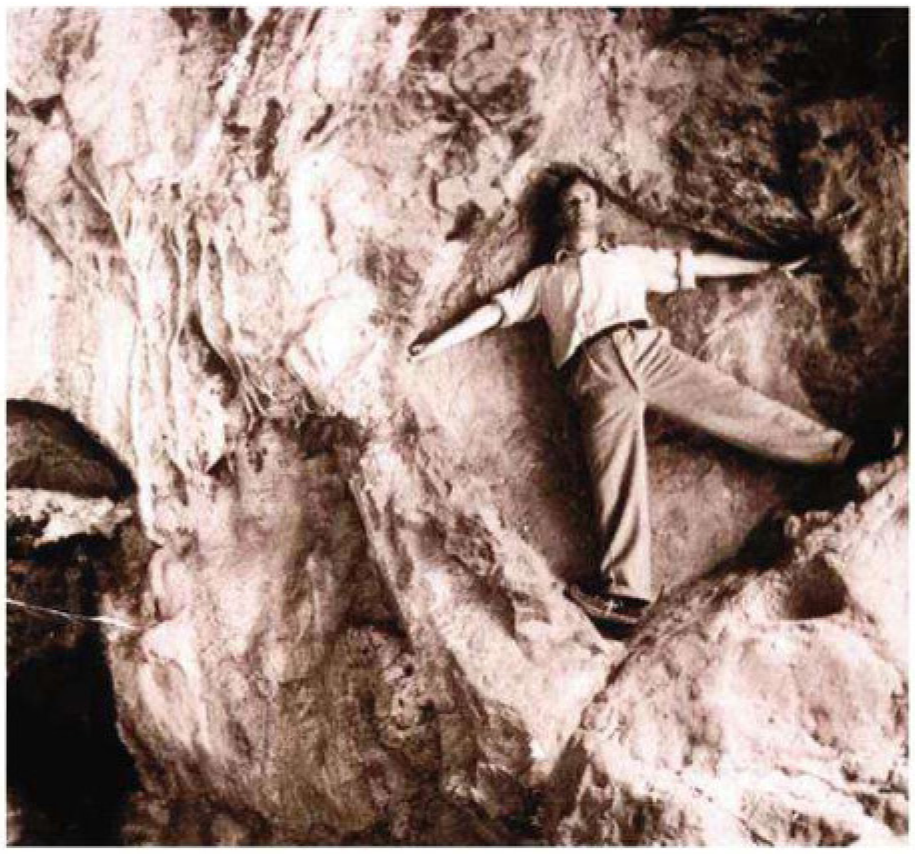
"Who?"

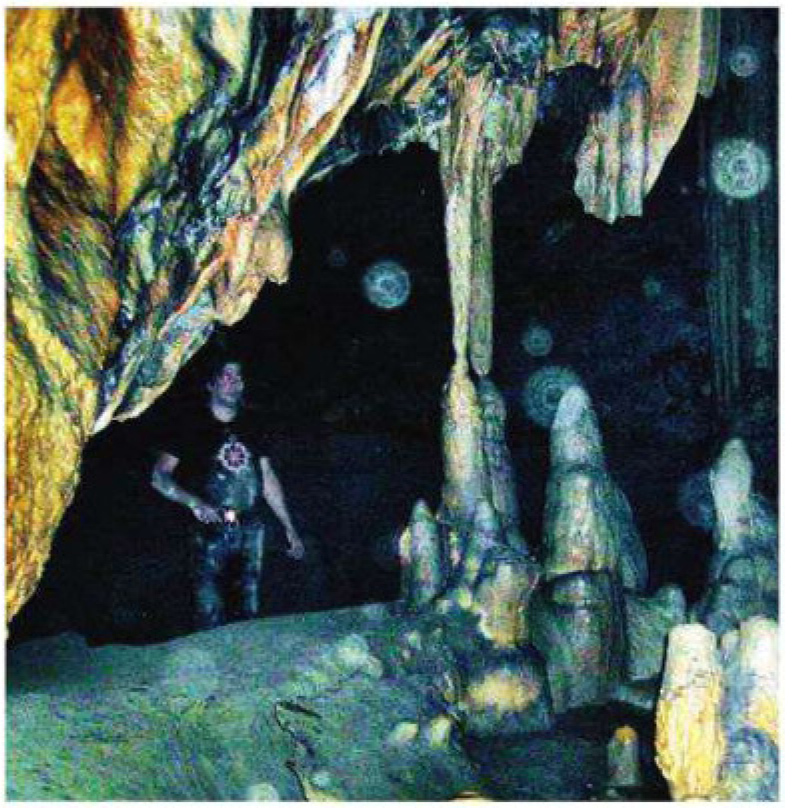
"The drawing on the cave wall?"

Paul looked at me blankly.

"I mean there are frequent Dante references in his work. In the radio show he recorded for you the year afterwards, he mentions a rock at the mouth of the cave that resembled a three-headed dog…"

"I won't play those games. He was a good man. He deserved





BOTH PIX: RICHARD STANLEY

ABOVE LEFT: Richard Stanley holds two of the mysterious 'bleeding stones' of the kind unearthed by Otto and Gadal in the Cathar caves around Ussat.

ABOVE RIGHT: The author retraces Otto's footsteps across the country of the Cathars; the Cave of the Hermit in summer 2009, complete with Orbs.

better."

"Perhaps he imagined that he was already living in Hell and Beatrice symbolised a way out of the cycle, a way back to God?"

Paul shook his head slowly. "He never used the word God. For him, Lucifer was something like a god. God could be anything to anyone. God is a chemical in which we swim…"

Paul claimed to have been present when the snapshot was taken, but his grasp on the events in Ussat-les-Bains and the provenance of the meteoric artefacts retrieved from Fontanet was disconcertingly vague, nor did the figure standing in the pentagram quite resemble the other images of Otto that had come into my possession. His niece, Ingheborg, confirmed my suspicions, holding her pendulum over the snapshot for a beat or two before pronouncing: "Otto would never wear tennis shoes."

It took another nine months to prove that the man in the photograph was in fact an individual named Karl Rinderknecht, an adherent of Gadal's 'Lectorium Rosicrucianum', a movement founded in the Netherlands in 1924 that the ambitious minister of tourism had reformed along his own neo-Cathar lines. To this day, members are compelled to make the pilgrimage to Ussat-les-Bains and stand in the stone pentagram in order to emerge as "new men". What baffled me most about the whole fandango was why Paul had been so determined to convince me, with virtually his dying breath, that his 'friend' Otto Rahn had been a fully initiated member.

Standing once more before the pentagram in the Bethlehem grotto, I tried in vain to piece the puzzle together in my head. It was tempting to dismiss the rumours of Otto finding the 'treasure of the ages' as another bizarre hoax, yet certain aspects of the story refused to be explained away. I had seen the meteoric artefacts for myself and indeed had two of the 'bleeding stones' in my possession; yet it was impossible to believe that I truly held the secret of life eternal in my grasp. Feeling a little worn out by it all, I lay down on the stone altar, watching the blackbirds nesting in the eaves of the cavern's vaulted roof. It was a hot, early summer afternoon and I must have drifted off to sleep. When I came to and returned my gaze to the pentagram, I felt a sudden, giddy rush of *déjà vu*.

Crossing to the wall, I reached out, finding worn handholds in the stone that enabled me to pull myself up to the same height as the pentagram. I unfastened my canteen and, washing away the dust of decades, saw at once the outlines of a face, exactly where I had imagined it to be: a single, surviving angelic eye staring back at me from out of the past. The image of a hope that never quite dried up – the face of Beatrice, whose memory guided Dante like a star on his journey to Hell.

INTO THE BLACK ORDER...

Within a year of leaving France, Otto was back in Germany. He made a point of visiting the remote castle of Germelshausen, where Christian Rosenkreutz was said to have been born. After recording a series of programmes for his friend Paul Ladame at Radio Geneva (including the provocatively titled "What happened to me in the Pyrenean cave!") he seems to have sojourned at Montserrat in Spain, the shrine of the Black Madonna and repository of one of the largest collections of mediæval manuscripts in the world. His first book, an insightful account of the persecution of the Cathars entitled *Crusade Against the Grail* appeared in the autumn of 1934, from Urban Verlag in Freiburg, to critical acclaim and fair-to-middling sales.

The following summer found Otto in Italy, this time in the company of the Tantric magician and committed pagan imperialist Baron Giulio (Julius) Evola (**FT191:40–45**). Something seems to have gone a little awry with his vacation plans, and another one of Otto's associates, Dr Adolphe Frise, describes how he was forced to rescue his friend from Milan and drive him hastily back to his home in Bad Homberg. Frise claims that Otto seemed visibly upset and chain-smoked throughout the journey, muttering darkly about how he was caught up in something he was not at liberty to explain. The true import of his words is lost to us, but back in Germany the forces of history were on the move. The German parliament, the Reichstag, had just been destroyed in a fire that would allow the National Socialist German Worker's Party to consolidate its hold on the levers of power. Within a few weeks, Otto would find himself summoned to Berlin for an urgent meeting with Reichsführer SS Himmler, who inducted him into the Black Order without further ado. To what extent his Nazi masters truly believed that Otto might know the physical whereabouts of the Holy Grail remains a mystery, but his subsequent rise through the ranks cleared the way for the young adept to bring his research to its logical conclusion and ultimately set in motion the macabre and tragic events that were to follow… FT

NEXT MONTH: PART TWO: THE COURT OF LUCIFER – RAHN'S RISE AND FALL IN THE NAZI PARTY

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

RICHARD STANLEY is a film-maker, anthropologist and author. His latest project is an adaptation of Clark Ashton Smith's 'Mother of Toads', part of the *Theatre Bizarre* anthology film. See www.shadowtheatre13.com.

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Dreaming the future?

Dreams have traditionally been credited with the ability to predict the future, and many people believe they have experienced highly accurate premonitions while fast asleep. Nonsense, says **RICHARD WISEMAN** – precognitive dreams can be easily explained by statistics and the science of sleep.

Aberfan is a small village in South Wales. In the 1960s, many of those living there worked at a nearby colliery that had been built to exploit the large amount of high quality coal in the area. Much of the waste from the mining operation had been piled on the steep hillsides surrounding the village, and throughout October 1966 heavy rain lashed down on the area and seeped into the porous sandstone of the hills. No one realised that the water was then flowing into several hidden springs and slowly transforming the pit waste into soft slurry.

Just after nine o'clock on 21 October, the side of the hill subsided and half a million tons of debris started to rapidly move towards the village. Much of it slid into Aberfan and smashed into the village school, filling several classrooms with a 10m (33ft)-deep mass of slurry. The pupils had left the school assembly hall a few moments before, having sung the hymn "All things bright and beautiful", and so were just arriving in their classrooms when the landslide hit. Parents and police rushed to the school and frantically began digging through the rubble. Although a handful of children were pulled out alive, 139 schoolchildren and five teachers lost their lives in the tragedy.

Psychiatrist John Barker visited the village the day after the landslide. Barker had a longstanding interest in the paranormal and wondered whether the extreme nature of events in Aberfan might have caused large numbers of people to experience a premonition about the tragedy. He arranged for the *Evening Standard* newspaper to ask any readers who thought they had foreseen the Aberfan disaster to get in touch. He received 60 letters from across England and Wales, with over half of the respondents claiming that their apparent premonition had come to them during a dream.

> She dreamt "there was no school there... something black had come down"

One of the most striking experiences was submitted by the parents of a 10-year-old child who perished in the tragedy. The day before the landslide, their daughter described dreaming about trying to go to school, but said that there was "no school there" because "something black had come down all over it". In another example, Mrs MH, a 54-year-old woman from Barnstable, said that the night before the tragedy she had dreamed that a group of children were trapped in a rectangular room. In her dream, the end of the room was blocked by several wooden bars and the children were trying to climb over the bars. Mrs MH was sufficiently worried by the dream to telephone her son and daughter-in-law and tell them to take special care of their two small daughters. And so the list went on.

Believing that you have seen the future in a dream is surprisingly common, with recent surveys suggesting that around a third of the population experience this phenomenon at some point in their lives. But are people really getting a glimpse of things to come? Throughout history, this question has taxed the minds of many of the world's greatest thinkers. However, it is only in the last century or so that researchers have come up with explanations.

Starting in the 1950s, sleep researchers began inviting people to spend the night in special laboratories, monitoring them as they entered the land of nod, waking them up whenever they had had a dream, and asking them to describe what was going through their minds. The work has yielded many important insights into dreaming. Almost everyone dreams in colour. Although some dreams are bizarre, many involve everyday chores such as doing the washing-up, filling in tax forms, or vacuuming. If you creep up on someone who is dreaming and quietly play some music, shine a light onto their face or spray them with water, they are very likely to incorporate the stimuli into their dreams. However, perhaps the most important revelation was that you have many more dreams than you might think.

Sleep scientists quickly discovered that you have an average of about four dreams each night, with each one lasting around 20

GETTY IMAGES / FOX PHOTOS

minutes. You then forget the vast majority of them when you wake up, leaving you with the impression that you dream far less than is actually the case. Most of the time, the dreams are unrelated to events that happen the following day and so you forget about them. However, once in a while one of the dreams will correspond to one of the events and will help trigger a memory of the dream. Under these circumstances, it is easy to convince yourself that your dream magically predicted the future. Interesting, but only a small part of the story.

"OTHER THAN THAT, DID YOU ENJOY THE PLAY, MRS LINCOLN?"

Open almost any book on the paranormal and you will soon discover that President Abraham Lincoln once had one of the most famous precognitive dreams in history. According to the story, in early April 1865 Lincoln went to close friend and bodyguard Ward Hill Lamon and explained that he had recently had a rather unsettling dream. During the dream Lincoln had felt a "death-like stillness" in his body and heard weeping from a downstairs room in the White House. After searching the building, he arrived at the East Room and came across a corpse wrapped in funeral vestments. A crowd of people were gazing mournfully at the body. When Lincoln asked who had died, he was told that it was the President, and that he had been assassinated.

Two weeks after the dream, Lincoln and his wife went to see a play at Ford's Theatre in Washington DC. A short time after the start of the play, Lincoln was shot dead by prominent actor and Confederate supporter John Wilkes Booth.

Once again, sleep research may provide an explanation for the case. In the late 1960s, researchers carried out a groundbreaking experiment with a group of patients who were attending therapy sessions to help them cope with the psychological effects of undergoing major surgery. The researchers monitored the patients' dreams over the course of several nights and discovered that when they had attended a therapy session during the day they were far more likely to dream about their medical problems. For example, one patient was having a tough time coping with the drainage tubes resulting from his surgery. After spending time at a therapy session talking about the issue, he was especially likely to have dreams that involved him continually inserting tubes into himself and others. In short, the patients' dreams tended to reflect their anxieties. Similar studies have revealed the same effect. The content of our dreams is not only affected by events in our surroundings, but also often reflects whatever is worrying our minds.

Paranormal investigator Joe Nickell has

ABOVE: the 1966 Aberfan disaster devastated a Welsh mining community and horrified the entire nation. Many people claimed to have dreamt of the event in advance.

HOW TO CONTROL YOUR DREAMS

GETTY IMAGES / RETROFILE / GEORGE MARKS

Harvard psychologist Daniel Wegner has come up with a simple but effective way of controlling your dreams. Wegner has carried out a great deal of work into the so-called "rebound effect", wherein people who are asked not to think about a certain issue have a surprisingly hard time keeping it out of their mind. Wegner wondered whether the same effect could also be used to influence people's dreams. To find out, he gathered together a group of participants, gave each of them two envelopes, and asked them to open one envelope just before they went to sleep at night and the other when they woke up in the morning.

The first envelope contained an unusual set of instructions. All of the participants were first asked to think of someone that they found especially attractive. Half of the participants were then instructed to spend five minutes trying not to think about this person, while the others were asked to think about their dream date. When everyone woke up in the morning they opened the second envelope and found another set of instructions. This time they were asked to describe any dreams that they had had during the night. Wegner discovered that participants who had tried *not* to think about the person they found attractive were roughly twice as likely as the others to have dreamed about that person. The message is clear – if you want to have a particular person crop up in your dreams, spend five minutes trying not to think about that person before you nod off.

argued that this might explain Lincoln's experience. Nickell has noted that even the briefest of glances through the history books reveals that Lincoln would have had every reason to be anxious about the possibility of being assassinated. Just before his first inauguration, he was advised to avoid travelling through Baltimore because his aides had uncovered an assassination plot there, and during his time in office he had received several death threats: on one especially memorable occasion, an incompetent would-be assassin fired a shot through his top hat. Seen in the light of these findings, Lincoln's famous dream suddenly looks less paranormal.

The same concept may also explain one of the most striking examples of alleged precognition about the Aberfan disaster. At the start of this article, I described how one of the young girls who would later perish in the tragedy told her parents that she had dreamed about "something black" coming down over her school and the school no longer being there. For several years before the disaster, the local authorities had expressed considerable concern about the wisdom of placing large amounts of mining debris on the hillside, but their worries had been ignored by those running the mine. There is no way of knowing for sure, but it is possible that the young girl's dream may have been reflecting these anxieties.

But what about the other cases in which people produced evidence that they had described their dream before the tragedy occurred, and where the dream did not seem to reflect their anxieties and concerns? To investigate, we need to move away from the science of sleep and into the heady world of statistics.

THE LAW OF LARGE NUMBERS

Let's take a closer look at the numbers associated with these seemingly supernatural experiences. First, let's select a random person from Britain and call him Brian. Next, let's make a few assumptions about Brian. Let's assume that Brian dreams each night of his life from age 15 to 75. There are 365 days in each year, so those 60 years of dreaming will ensure that Brian experiences 21,900 nights of dreams. Let's also assume that an event like the Aberfan disaster will only happen once in each generation, and randomly assign it to one day. Now, let's assume that Brian will only remember dreaming about the type of terrible events associated with such tragedies once in his entire life. The chances of Brian having his 'disaster' dream the night before the actual tragedy is about a massive 22,000 to 1. Little wonder that Brian would be surprised if it happened to him.

However, here comes the sneaky bit. When Brian is thinking about the chances of the event happening to him he is being very self-centred. In the 1960s, there were around 45 million people in Britain, and this same set of events could have happened to any of them. Given that we have already calculated that the chances of any one of them having the 'disaster' dream one night and the tragedy happening the following day is about 22,000 to 1, we would expect 1 person in every 22,000, or roughly 2,000 people, to have this amazing experience in each generation. To say that this group's dreams are accurate is like shooting an arrow into a field, drawing a target around it after it has landed and saying, "Wow, what are the chances of that?"

The principle is known as the 'Law of Large Numbers', and states that unusual events are likely to happen when there are lots of opportunities for that event. It is exactly the same with any national lottery. The chances of any one person hitting the jackpot is millions to one, but still it happens as regular as clockwork each week because such a large number of people buy tickets.

For genuine evidence of premonitions then, the situation is even worse than we have imagined. Our example only concerned people dreaming about the Aberfan tragedy. In reality, national and international bad fortune happens on an almost daily basis. Aeroplane crashes, tsunamis, assassinations, serial killers, earthquakes, kidnappings, acts of terrorism, and so on. Given that people often dream about doom and gloom, the numbers quickly stack up and acts of apparent prophecy are inevitable.

The science of sleep and the study of statistics suggest that precognitive dreams are due to selective remembering, anxiety, and the law of large numbers. Of course, it could always be argued that although these explanations are true of many apparently precognitive dreams, some others are still genuinely supernatural. The bad news is that although testing this sounds simple in theory, it's tricky in practice. It's no good asking people to get in touch *after* a national disaster or tragedy because they are likely to report just one of many dreams that they have had, or be part of the group of people who happened to get lucky via the law of large numbers. Also, you can't ask people to dream about an event that is in any way predictable. Instead, you have to record lots of people's prophecies *before* an *unpredictable* event has happened. According to the law of large numbers, you would end up with a huge range of predictions, with just a small sliver of them subsequently proving correct. In contrast, those with a paranormal bent would predict that this would produce a surprisingly large number of the premonitions that point to one particular future. The good news is that such a study has already been carried out.

"THE BIGGEST STORY SINCE THE RESURRECTION"

In 1927, 25-year-old American Air Mail pilot Charles Lindbergh achieved international fame by making the first solo, non-stop flight across the Atlantic. Two years later, Lindbergh married author Anne Spencer Morrow, and the two of them continued to attract huge amounts of publicity by setting several additional flying records, including being the first people to fly from Africa to South America, and pioneering exploration of polar air routes from North America to Asia. In 1930, the Lindberghs had their first child, Charles Lindbergh Jr, and moved into a large secluded mansion in Hopewell, New

Jersey.

On 1 March 1932, the Lindberghs' world changed forever. At around 10pm, the Lindberghs' nurse rushed to Charles Sr and told him that Charles Jr had been taken from his room, and that the kidnappers had left a ransom note demanding $50,000. Lindbergh quickly grabbed a gun and searched the grounds. He discovered the homemade ladder that had been used to climb into the child's second-storey room, but found no sign of his son. The police were called and Colonel Norman Schwarzkopf took charge of the case, organising a massive search effort. The Lindberghs' fame resulted in the case generating an enormous amount of publicity, with one journalist referring to it as "the biggest story since the Resurrection".

A few days after the news of the kidnapping broke, Harvard psychologist Henry Murray decided to use the high profile case to study the accuracy of precognitive dreaming. He persuaded a national newspaper to ask their readers to submit any premonitions about the case that had appeared in their dreams. Word of Murray's study spread from one newspaper to another, resulting in the psychologist eventually receiving over 1,300 responses. To properly assess the replies, Murray was forced to wait two years until the crime was solved.

Within a few days of his son's disappearance, Lindbergh made various public appeals for the kidnapper to start negotiations. None of them elicited a response. However, when retired schoolteacher John Condon placed an article in a newspaper making it clear that he was willing to act as a go-between and add an additional $1,000 to the ransom, he received a series of notes from the alleged kidnapper. On the second of April, one note asked Condon to meet in a Bronx cemetery and to hand over $50,000 in gold certificates in exchange for information about the child's location. Condon collected the certificates from Lindbergh, handed them over at the meeting, and was told that the child could be found on a boat that was moored along the Massachusetts coast. Lindbergh flew over the region for days but failed to find the alleged boat.

On 12 May 1932, a truck driver pulled over to the side of a road a few miles from the Lindbergh home and walked into a grove of trees to relieve himself. There he chanced upon the corpse of Charles Lindbergh Jr, buried in a hastily prepared shallow grave. The baby's skull was badly fractured, and his left leg and both hands were missing. A coroner's examination later showed that the baby had been dead for about two months, and that his death was due to a blow on the head.

GETTY IMAGES / AFP

LEFT: Aviation pioneer Charles Lindbergh.

BELOW: Lindbergh's young son was kidnapped and later found dead. Psychic dreams didn't help much.

GETTY IMAGES / AFP

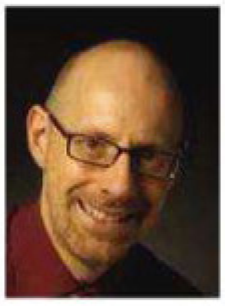
Only about five per cent of responses suggested the baby was dead

For over two years, the police struggled to solve the crime. Then, in September 1934, a petrol station attendant became suspicious when a customer paid for five gallons of petrol with a ten dollar gold certificate. The attendant took a note of the customer's number plate and passed it on to the authorities. The police identified the vehicle's owner as Bruno Richard Hauptmann, an illegal German immigrant then working as a carpenter. Police searched Hauptmann's house, discovered $14,000 of the ransom money, and promptly arrested him. During Hauptmann's trial, the prosecution showed that his handwriting matched the ransom notes sent to Condon, and that the floorboards in his house were made of the same wood as the ladder discovered at the Lindbergh's house. After an 11-hour deliberation, the jury returned a guilty verdict and Hauptmann was sentenced to death.

Case closed, Murray set to work. He examined his collection of alleged premonitions for three important pieces of information that would have helped the police investigation enormously – the fact that the baby was dead, buried in a grave, and that the grave was near some trees. Only about five per cent of the responses suggested that the baby was dead, and only four of the 1,300 responses mentioned that he was buried in a grave near some trees. In addition, none of them mentioned the ladder, extortion notes or ransom money. Exactly as predicted by the "dream premonitions are the work of normal, not paranormal forces" brigade, the respondents' premonitions were all over the place, with only a handful of them containing information that subsequently proved to be accurate. Murray was forced to conclude that his findings did "not support the contention that distant events and dreams are causally related."

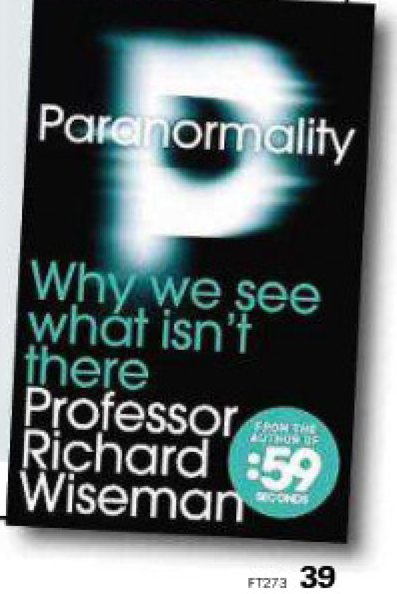
For thousands of years, people believed that their dreams could provide a fleeting glimpse of the future. Science has provided explanations for many of these alleged acts of prophecy. You dream far more than you think you do and only remember those dreams that appear to come true. Many of your dreams revolve around topics that make you feel anxious and so are more likely to be related to future events. Nearly everyone dreams, and so some of the many millions of dreams that take place each night will depict future events by chance alone. Carry out experiments that eliminate these factors and suddenly the sleeping mind cannot figure out what tomorrow will bring. There are many more mysteries of sleep waiting to be solved, but one thing is certain – for those who want to believe in the reality of the paranormal, the findings from the science of sleep are a nightmare.

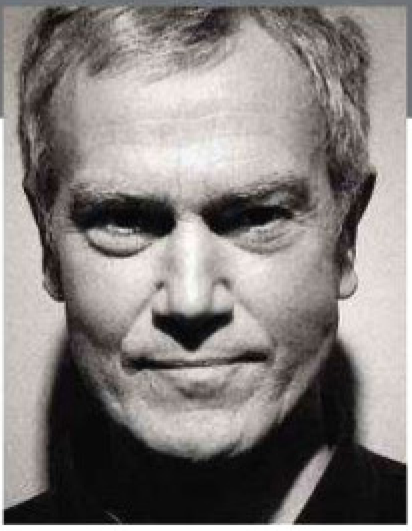
AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



RICHARD WISEMAN is a former magician and Professor of the Public Understanding of Psychology at the University of Hertfordshire. He is the author of *Paranormality: Why we see what isn't there*, published by Macmillan on 3 Mar 2011.

THANKS TO MACMILLAN, FORTEAN TIMES READERS CAN BUY RICHARD WISEMAN'S **PARANORMALITY: WHY WE SEE WHAT ISN'T THERE** FOR THE SPECIAL PRICE OF £6.99, INCLUDING POSTAGE AND PACKING. PLEASE CALL 01256 302699, QUOTING OFFER CODE 5JT. OFFER APPLIES TO UK ORDERS ONLY AND IS AVAILABLE UNTIL 31 MARCH.


Paranormality
Why we see what isn't there
Professor Richard Wiseman
FROM THE AUTHOR OF :59 SECONDS



JOHN FOXX SHIFTING CITIES

JOHN FOXX came to fame as the lead singer of late-Seventies new wave pioneers Ultravox!, before forging a varied career as a musician in his own right (his debut album *Metamatic* sounds as groundbreaking now as it did 30 years ago), and later as a sought-after graphic artist, designing the jackets for Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* and Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry*. Recent years have seen Foxx's work veering in the direction of ambient, multimedia pieces, with projects like *Cathedral Oceans* and *Tiny Colour Movies* showcasing his photography and experimental film installations as much as his music. **ETIENNE GILFILLAN** talked to him about Surrealism, science and the psychogeography of modern cities.

FORTEAN TIMES: Much of your earlier more pop-oriented musical work evokes Ballardian themes of desolation – crumbling cities, dystopian suburbias – but where did you draw inspiration for your more ambient work, albums like *DNA* and *Cathedral Oceans*?

JOHN FOXX: I guess everything really came from *The Quiet Man* book, which is about an old grey suit that is somehow alive and London becoming overgrown; it's about the way cities can alter us, and our memories. The *DNA* work is a loose set of music for imaginary movies – some of which I intend to make – also generated from the same source.

FT: Your photographic work also reflects the two sides of your musical personality – the images of verdant, overgrown man-made structures reclaimed by nature that accompany *Cathedral Oceans*, versus the surreal film-noir-meets-science fiction imagery of, for instance, *My Lost City*. Where do these two seemingly opposite visual directions stem from? And what photographers or artists have inspired these two paths?

JF: I think they stem from a childhood that coincided with the dissolution of the factories in the north of England. There was a series of other major shifts at that time, from the devastation of World War II bombing in Liverpool and Manchester, right down to the decline of cinemas and the incoming construction of the motorway network in the early 1960s. Everything was change: decline, ruins, overgrowth, then re-growth.

Cinema also played a great part in connecting and condensing all this. Every time I saw a science fiction film, I imagined it to be located somewhere in the local landscape. This really came into focus with *Quatermass*, which was set in urban and industrial Britain. Then there are movies about empty cities, like *Last Year in Marienbad*. Even film stills, such as the one from *The H Man*, always stimulate the imagination. Or powerful and beautiful images such as Piranesi's 'Carceri' series and his marvellous etchings of Rome in ruins...

I suppose the artists who inspired some of these things would be the Surrealists – Max Ernst's collages, René Magritte's paintings and ideas, and *Un Chien Andalou*, that marvelous film by Buñuel and Dalí. Then there's Marcel Duchamp, who I think is the most important figure in contemporary art. Everyone else seems busy reconfiguring aspects of what he laid out over 70 years ago.

I also saw a painting in the early 1970s by an artist whose name I can't remember. It appeared to be an aerial perspective of a jungle or forest. Gradually, you came to see that it was an overgrown London, viewed from Centrepoint.

FT: Have there been any places in the world which have left a strong mark on you and influenced your photographic or musical work?

JF: Perhaps the most powerful was Rome. Through visiting it, I realised that everything is connected, and much of what we know and see comes, by evolution and reformation, from the civilisation embodied in that city. Even the mill buildings of Lancashire are a version of monumental Roman patterns. New York was built at about the same time as Manchester and Liverpool, and they all share the same materials and evolution of architectural style, as if they are all a single city. I feel as though I spend my life walking between them, and at points they all dissolve into each other. Add Paris, Berlin and London as suburbs of that city, as well.

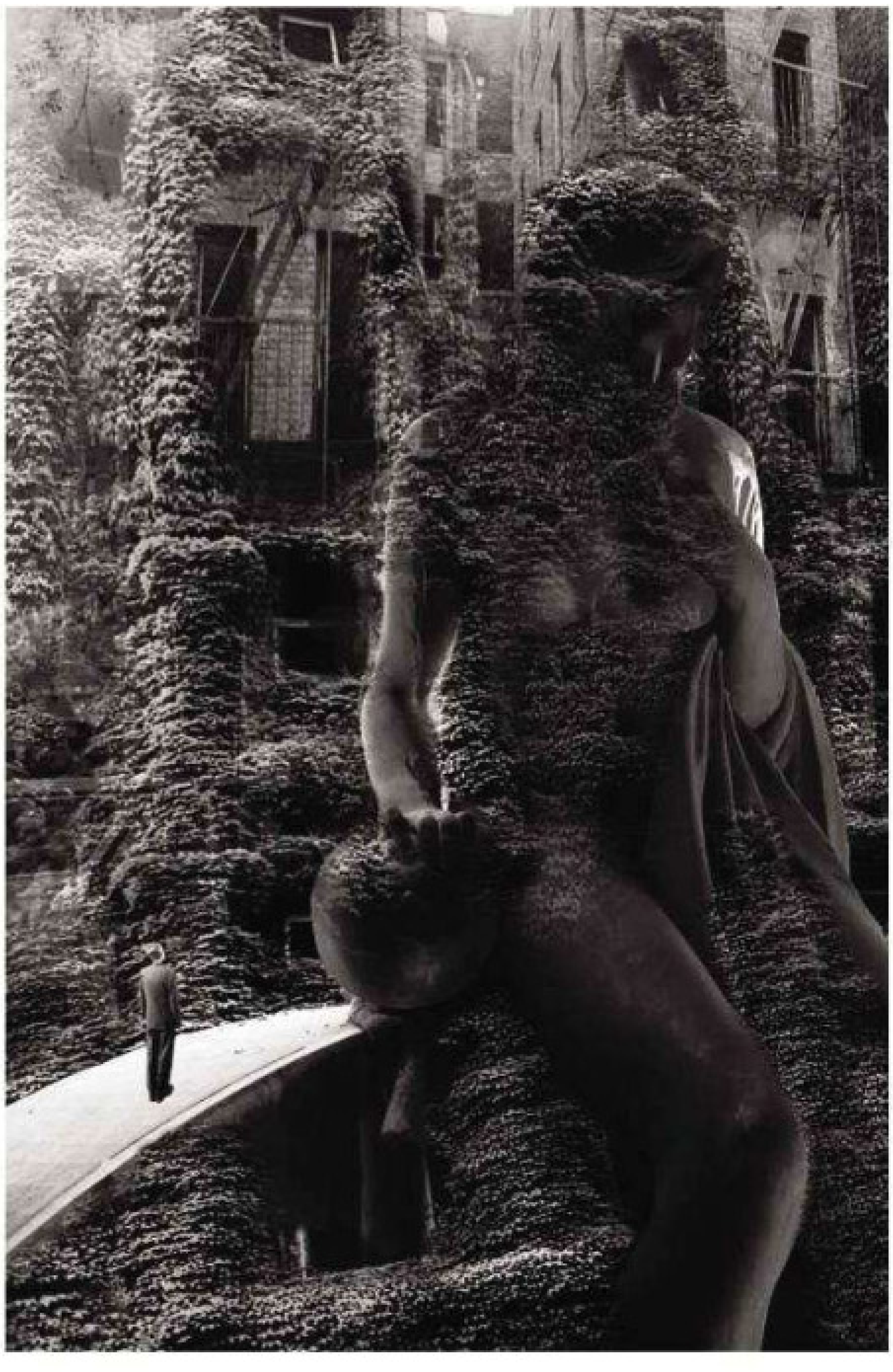
Seeing Piranesi's etchings also connected Rome with the massive overgrown mill buildings we played in as children. Then, of course, I came to London and the East End was almost as overgrown and beautifully desolate. Our building in Holywell Lane had birch trees growing out of the top window.

FT: Does your fascination with architecture and cities extend to an interest in, on the one hand, "sacred geometry" or, on the other, the kind of psychogeographical investigations we find in the work of Iain Sinclair and other writers and filmmakers?

JF: There are several connections here. I know from experience that places can colour and even direct behaviour, in subtle and often unconscious ways. Proportion, scale, shadow and light, and all their attendant rhythms can produce powerful physical and internal effects.

Hidden architectural intentions and demonstrations of the effects of large-scale symmetries and imposed geometries have certainly been inserted into cities at various points in history. Accidental and unintentional effects are also mixed in with these. Little of any of this has really been properly accounted for or understood yet. Meanwhile, it's all taking effect on massive populations daily – since we all have to move through it constantly.

There may be many other unexpected effects – particularly from close proximity with millions of other people. The way you can detect a distinct relief from



LEFT: *The Giant Statue* by John Foxx, Part of *The Quiet Man* series II.
FACING PAGE: *Shifting City 1* by John Foxx, part of the *DNA* series.

surrounding mental static when everyone is asleep, for instance, around two to five in the morning. What is this? Women who live in the same apartment will find their menstruation cycles eventually synchronise. What does this imply more generally, in the area of consensus or thought processes?

We all know there are several concurrent languages occurring simultaneously and developing continuously – the languages of physical movement, clothing, words, etiquettes, media of various kinds, pictures, architecture. These all have both an immediate and a cumulative effect. The cumulative effect is the hardest to understand, but the most profound – it's rather like a fish attempting to view water objectively.

And we now all live in these cages of pulsing electromagnetic energy – simply through the electrical wiring passing around every wall. This has only been operating for 50 years or so. It seems like a small thing, but the long-term effects may yet unfold in unexpected ways. Aside from damage, it may even provide new means of communication – perhaps it already does.

We all give our lives to the city in much the same way a bee gives its life to the hive, and we are equally unconscious of this dependency. Paradoxically, we consider ourselves to be independent, autonomous individuals, while being too busy to properly observe and comprehend what is actually happening. Cities are now big enough to create their own weather – the grey clouds over London are the rising exhalations from millions of people, condensing as they meet cooler air above. We receive our own drizzle.

Modern cities are now the biggest population areas on the planet. I would guess that the totality of their psychic and physical ecologies will manifest some fascinating new opportunist forms of life very soon. It's a new ecology – the grey ecology. Future David Attenborough-style programmes will investigate it.

> "Cities are so big they create their own weather. We receive our own drizzle."

At least as interesting as all this is the unconscious investment we all make by using the city as a sort of self-programming repository of memory. It goes something like this: when we first arrive, most cities will seem bleak and inhuman. Over time, each experience softens that rawness by an inevitable slow accumulation of associations with places, until every street carries some memory or connection. All these come into play each time we move through them. Layer upon layer of associations accumulate every moment, until the city literally becomes your memory. Then of course, you find you're right at home.

I really find, of all the modern writers, that Iain Sinclair has it about right, He was the first to describe contemporary London, especially the Shoreditch area, in its true context – its fascinating and dark history and its architecture, the geometries and structures of which hint at some very strange connections and continuing effects.

Peter Ackroyd then carried this into a new sort of fiction in *Hawksmoor* and *English Music* – in fact, a whole new genre of a darkly mythologised London was made possible through Sinclair's primary observations in *Lud Heat* and *Suicide Bridge*.

FT: Your *Tiny Colour Movies* CD accompanies a series of 'found' films. Can you explain how this project came into being... and tell us more about a few of the films, some of which touch on very fortean topics: spontaneous human combustion, cover-ups and conspiracies, psychic transference and birdsong.

JF: Well, all these are fascinating, and I've always enjoyed devising experiments designed to investigate those sorts of things, and all the stories you get around them. One of my favourite books is *An Experiment with Time* by JW Dunne. He was a sort of correct, military Edwardian, a precise pragmatist who also possessed great curiosity and an open-minded investigative bent – very much the sort of character who might be cast as a Wellsian hero, like the scientist who created the time machine. He really epitomises a sort of thinking I've been trying to recapture in a modern context.

With *Tiny Colour Movies*, wanted to present some of that sort of activity – the possibility of making major breakthroughs via kitchen table experiments, the way that major Victorian and Edwardian discoveries came about. It's easy to forget that they made modern life possible – everything from steam to the harnessing of electricity, then radio and television. Lately though, we seem to have forgotten these possibilities of domestic discovery, and allowed scientists to monopolise the possibility of scientific breakthrough.

I recently find I'm spending lots of time devising experiments and areas of investigation and attempting to find people who have investigated similar areas in the past. Often you find they were ignored or ridiculed – but mostly just overlooked.

In *Tiny Colour Movies*, the psychiatrist working with the phenomenon of projection is currently my favourite. It's a film of a series of startling transfigurations brought about through literally projecting other entities onto a subject – a sort of visual illustration of the rather more subtle psychiatric phenomenon, but I think it demonstrates the principle beautifully.

The birdsong section is something I came across some years ago – the idea that massed birdsong contains the voices of the dead… we all disperse into it eventually. This seems to be a poetic and true example of that interface between science, spirituality and the physical world that I really enjoy. And it all seems to bear up from every angle – the birds we hear at any point were themselves earth and leaves just a couple of years before, and will be again in another two years.

Their bodies – and ours – are made up of material that originated in distant stars, and over several million years this material has certainly been incorporated in various other forms, from dinosaurs to forests to birds. Therefore, at any given moment we incorporate molecules that may once have belonged to, say, Leonardo Da Vinci – or a blowfly.

It's all in constant flux, and it all re-forms and sings for a while along the way.

FT: I'm aware you've made a clear distinction in that when you talk about 'ghosts of the media age' you are referring to the artefacts of different creative media from the past haunting the creative acts of our present and future, rather than ghosts of a supernatural kind; but you are also fascinated by Edison and his experiments in trying to create a device to communicate with spirits… What prompted this interest, and did it lead you to any further investigations into similar subjects? Are there other topics within the fortean repertoire that have held a similar fascination for you?

JF: I'm very interested in where the demarcation lines between science and those sorts of areas lie – and I think it might surprise many people. Human beings are very good at decanting very old activities into new ones, without consciously recognising the connection. For instance, the way a priesthood might tend to monopolise direct access to spiritual experience, then come to use this as a means of control and acquisition of power and status, in any society. I see scientists of various kinds currently engaged in very similar activities for very similar reasons.

The usual sequence occurs: an ensuing elaboration of largely self-referential theory and writing, which seems to be deliberately positioned beyond criticism, by being made to seem esoteric and difficult for the rest of us to examine. In the end, only 'experts' may make a valid comment. Any outsider challenge risks ridicule, yet paradoxically, there is an insistence that what is being espoused ought to be revered and universally acknowledged as 'the truth'.

> "The Higgs boson and angels on pinheads seem like intimately related devices"

Viewed from this perspective, the Higgs bosun and angels on pinheads seem intimately related devices.

Perhaps the whole tiresome process is a very human trait. After all, the same exponential growth of busy, puritanical personnel and written bilge also occurs when bureaucracies become autonomous. I've even witnessed the same process of professionalised obfuscation evolve in 'fine art' critical writing. I think this tendency to elaborate may be a genetic trait, carried over from those tiny creatures that eventually gave us coral reefs.

FT: In a similar vein, what are your feelings about the supernatural and its uneasy relationship with science, considering that each technology has brought us an awareness and knowledge of realms that would once have been considered heretical? Sound and image travelling through airwaves, X-rays, microscopy and advances in medical science, for instance.

JF: We might need to make some distinction here between what has come to be known as 'theoretical science' and the real thing. Science is intrinsically conservative – it can't allow anything unproven and unrepeatable into itself, otherwise it simply would not be functional. We need to maintain a body of knowledge that is proven and trustworthy and not at all speculative. To allow unproven elements in would be destructive of the rest, because this body of knowledge is a distillation of everything the human race has accumulated in its history, and can rely upon as true and certain – as much as anything can be in this Universe.

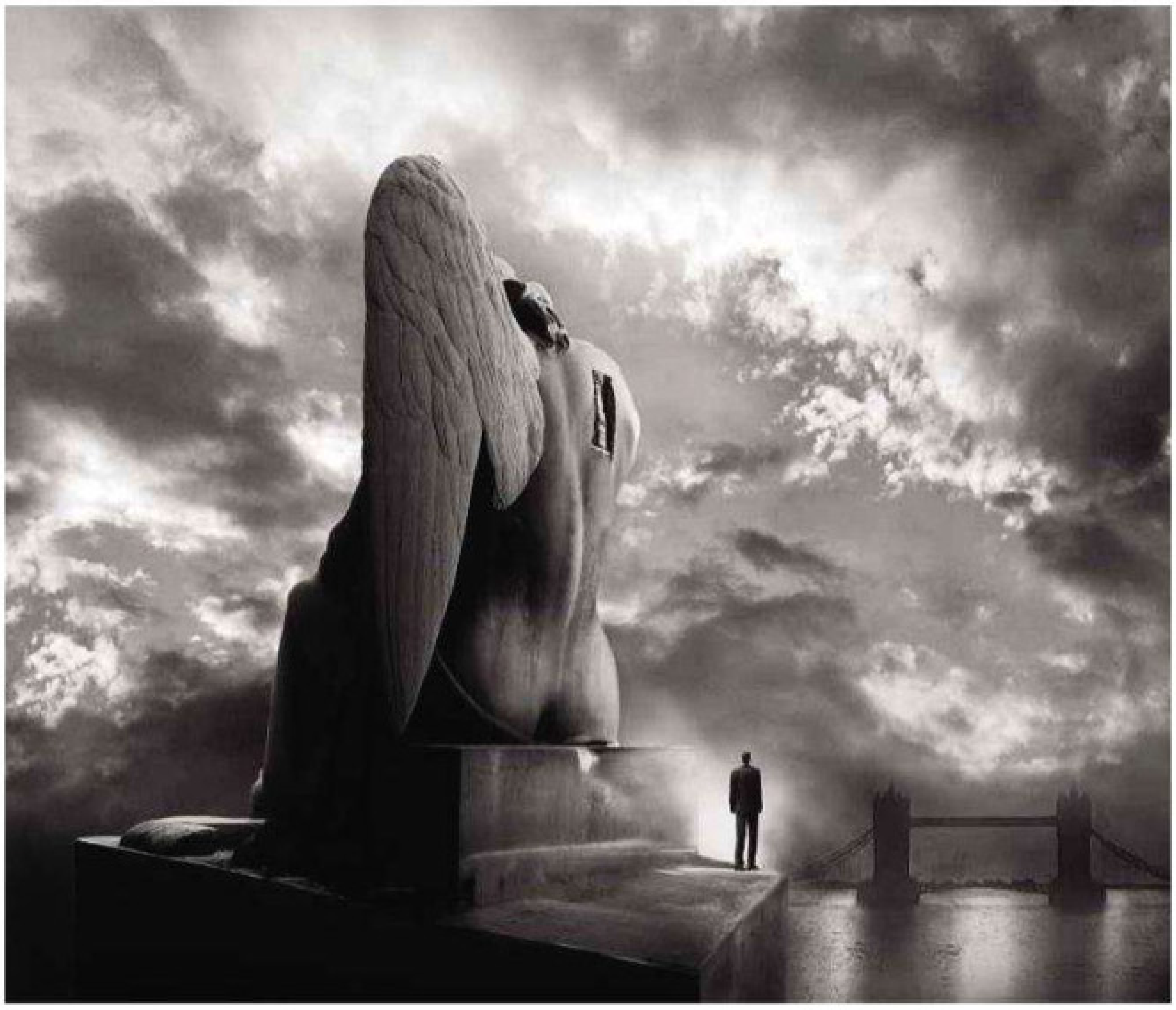
So the theoretical side is a complete misnomer and ought to have another title, because it is very far from being 'science'. 'Speculative science' or 'unproven science' might be better terms – science-in-waiting. Ideas that still require testing by reliable physical experiment. This is not to say that theory and speculation have no place – they are of course absolutely vital and must continue, so they can eventually add to the body of science – but only after being proven through physical testing.

I say 'physical' to distinguish between this and mathematical proof – since mathematics is rather like a map, simply not the territory it represents. Rather it's an intellectual model or construct, and as such, fallible in many ways.

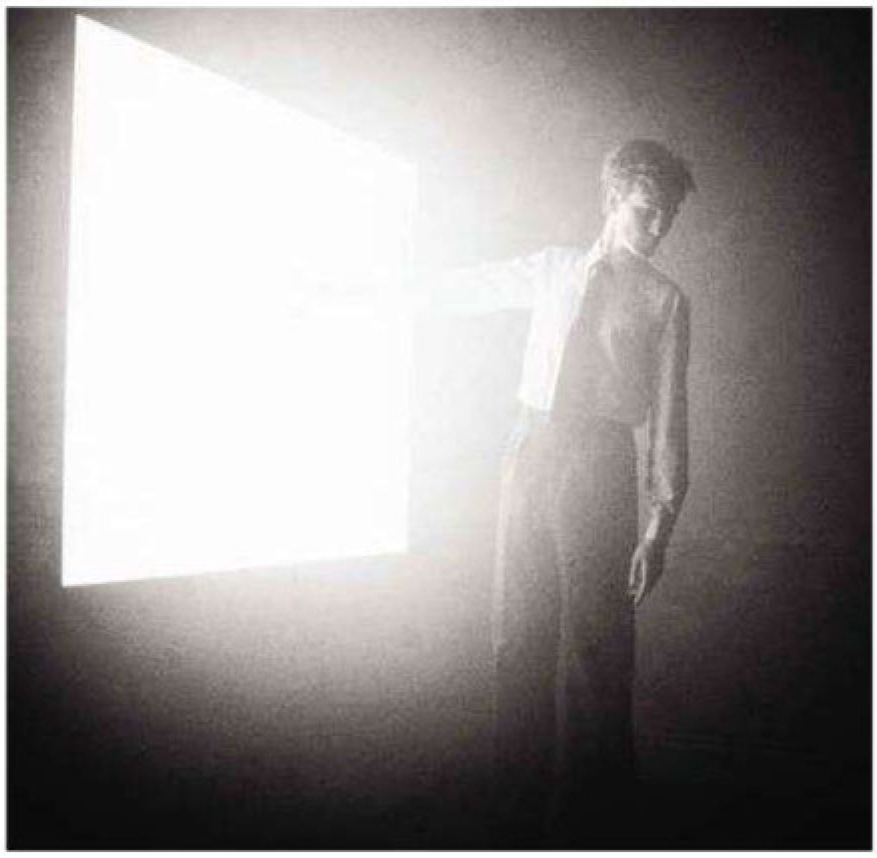
On the other hand, I think we need a more considered view of the improbable, the seemingly impossible, the wildly imaginative, the inadmissible – and the persistent. There are several concepts that seem to require much more attention, yet are routinely locked out.

I'm also very aware of the æsthetics of theory. These closely resemble the pleasures of fiction or music or drama – things that may not exist and which may not be useful, but which are pleasing in some way. Beautiful, exciting and mysterious stories. I love a good story too. Making these is what humans seem to do best.

I'm equally aware that the best



LEFT: *Tower Bridge Angel* by John Foxx, part of his *DNA* series. **FACING PAGE:** John Foxx in an unused photo for the sleeve of his 1980 album *Metamatic*.



CRAIG HEWITT

stories are those that seem most convincing – which appear to be true, feel as if they ought to be true. And there are lots of those presently mixed in with the more obvious contenders in the realms of theoretical science.

Another aspect of all this is, just as religion doesn't have any monopoly of spiritual experience, I strongly feel that modern science doesn't have any monopoly of discovery. I think there are still many discoveries to be made by simple, close observation and reasoning, involving both our internal and external ecologies.

Many manifestations of technology can be equally well understood in terms of ectoplasm, mysticism, æther and ghosts, for instance, as in scientific terms. So this raises the question: aren't they often discussing the same thing?

Even the term 'medium' springs from that early scientific investigation of the invisible, intangible, but powerful connection. These investigations eventually gave us electricity, radio and television and it was assumed that this was the end of it. I think it may just be a beginning. We still don't even know what electricity is, even though we know how we can use it. I think this goes for lots of things we do – and think.

We seem to enjoy imagining that we are a set of individuals, for instance, when nothing could be further from the truth. Often we seem little more self-aware than a flock of starlings – or a shoal of red herrings.

Susan Hiller's remarkably perceptive new exhibition touches on some of these themes and relationships – voices of the dead from untuned radio static, alien voices from television screens, telepathy, telekinesis, ghosts, out-of-body experiences… We gain admission to the other side of our so-called "rational" civilisation – that great, barely acknowledged sea of strange stories and accounts of inexplicable events, which circulates eternally among us. One of the tenets of her work is that "Artists' research disturbs the kind of research that scientists do." And true to her intention, this exhibition refreshes the connections we all feel with the unexplained, the overlooked, and the tantalising, while acknowledging the deep human values and meanings indicated by the persistence of such visions. Another attractive implication of this particular exhibition concerns the scientific puritanism of Dawkins and co., and raises the question – may this now be seen to exist inside perspectives far wider and deeper than any of those scientists seem capable of perceiving?

FT: You have often mentioned the Futurists and their noise machines. How did these early music pioneers influence your work? Did early electronic pioneers like Dodge, Babbitt, Scott, Subotnick and so on have a similar influence on your music?

JF: The Futurists first defined music as organised sound. They also had the first æsthetic for acceptance of machines and music in art – and in the practice of everyday life. They saw cities as beautiful and the noise of industry as pleasing. Then they made noise generators for public performance.

I detested their politics – but those other elements resonated, since I was looking for new ways of viewing and coming to terms with the modern world. I even found the noise of passing traffic and jet planes tremendously exciting. My first drone song was sung over the continuous drone of a motorway. It was as daft as that – but it worked. I got a viable song from it – a pure, Futurist piece of music.

As for those early pioneers – I feel it's important to remember the motivations behind their work. And it's surprising to discover how it was often driven by a sort of instinctive mysticism.

FT: Have you ever experimented with electronic sounds outside of music… for instance, trying to do EVP recording?

JF: Well, I did a lot of leaving microphones and video recorders on in empty rooms and houses – and got several interesting results. This was way before that recent movie!

But even without all this, there is something intrinsically strange about the act of recording that we are only just becoming aware of – how it creates all kinds of evanescent and permanent traces, displacements and overlaps. How media is becoming an externalised, globalised memory system, containing its own ghosts. That view of the 'ghost in the machine' has been endlessly useful in making this process visible.

FT: Having tackled music, photography, painting and book design, is there any other medium you are curious to experiment in that you haven't yet explored?

JF: Urban design. I'd dearly love to reconsider London.

There are over a hundred rivers currently buried beneath London. Why not use them? Some streets in the centre would have pavement replaced by glass walkways over the excavated rivers beneath, which would be lit and planted. Beautiful at night. At strategic points, these rivers would turn millwheel generators, out of sight. Riverpower would run street lights and public lighting systems. Soho would be linked to Hyde Park, Richmond Park and Hampstead Heath via green highways. Some buildings would be entirely composed of living trees.

A series of huge, linked, floating islands on the Thames, forming a tree-bearing central park, so you could walk across it. A few of these islands might carry public buildings that could be moved and moored in various places. Some would be almost entirely used as power farms, via solar panels. Some would also have revolving blade generators beneath, moved by the rivers' currents. All rooftops in the city would have to carry panels.

No cars – you'd have to walk, cycle or swim. Cars and goods transportation relegated to tube tunnels. Only engineless transport goes overground. Human-powered and electric bicycles, moving at the speed of a milk float. Free access on every street, powered by the river islands and local solar panels. Just leave them at the nearest plug point when you reach your destination.

I'd like to have a place to test every wild utopian idea – just to see if it has any substance. We need to do it now!

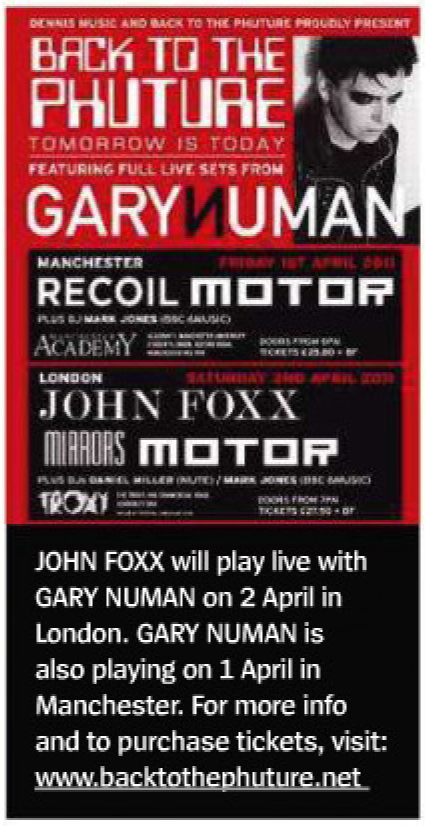
FT: Finally, you're sharing a stage with Gary Numan for the first time this year. Has a collaboration ever crossed either of your minds?

JF: Oh it gets talked about – and it may even happen at some point. I really rate Gary's work. He's a genuine star, and that's a very rare thing. FT

Turn to p76 for "It Happened To Me… Gary Numan and John Foxx"

For more on John Foxx, go to: www.thequietman.co.uk

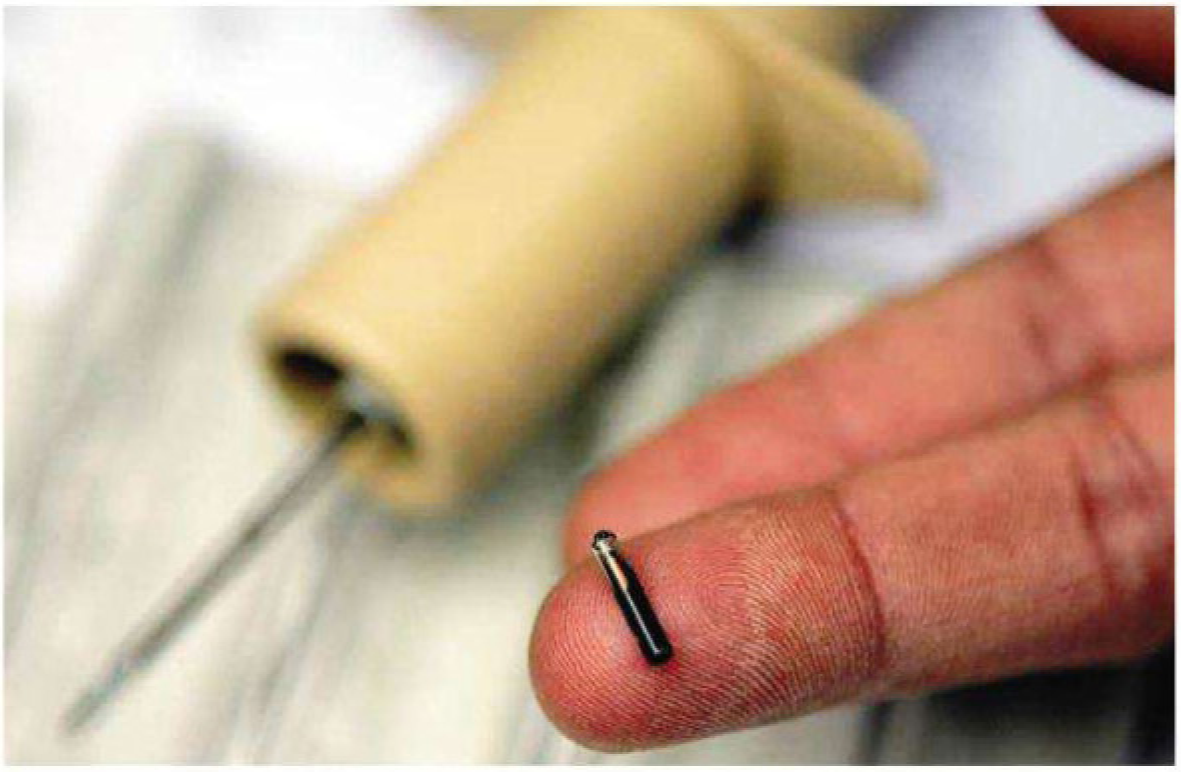
To order prints of John Foxx's work, go to: http://bit.ly/enmZZ2 (duck-artshop.com).



JOHN FOXX will play live with GARY NUMAN on 2 April in London. GARY NUMAN is also playing on 1 April in Manchester. For more info and to purchase tickets, visit: www.backtothephuture.net

A GAME OF TAG

Stories of people convinced that they have been implanted with mysterious chips or devices – sometimes by extraterrestrials – have been circulating for years. But a recent case suggests that not all such claims are the product of paranoia and delusion... and that those responsible for the implants may be much closer to home. **DAVID HAMBLING** investigates...


GETTY IMAGES / CHINA PHOTOS

James Walbert is the victim of a new type of harassment. An electronic device embedded in his shoulder not only tracks his every move, it also causes painful muscle contractions. Walbert believes the device was covertly implanted to locate and torture him by remote control. There is no shortage of stories like this on the Internet, but what makes Walbert different from thousands of alleged victims of 'gang stalking' (**FT228:18–19**; **272:23**) and electronic harassment is the hard evidence backing up his claims. His may be the case which finally pushes issues of unauthorised electronic implants into the mainstream.

Mr Walbert is not especially rich, famous or influential. He lives in the comparative obscurity of Wichita, Kansas, in the heart of rural America. He is not in conflict with drug cartels, multinational corporations or government agencies. This might make him an unlikely target for high-tech harassment. However, Walbert has an array of supporters from scientific, medical and political circles who suggest otherwise.

The initial response to this sort of claim might be to question Walbert's sanity, but he has proven himself to be sane enough. A letter from Dr Jacque Blackman of the Wichita Clinic certifies that Walbert "has no mental problems". Dr Blackman states that while Walbert's claims might *sound* like paranoia, there is no mental illness involved. He seems sympathetic but baffled by the case; perhaps because the problem is outside the field of medicine.

RADIO SCANS REVEALED A SIGNAL FROM HIS UPPER BACK

Investigator William J Taylor has many years of experience in dealing with bugging technology, and is a recognised expert in the field of technical surveillance. He has been involved in a number of high-profile cases, including that of Karen Silkwood, the nuclear whistleblower who died in a car crash under mysterious circumstances in 1974. As part of his investigation into Walbert's claim, Taylor scanned him with two portable radio-frequency detection devices to pick up any emissions from implants.

Taylor's scans found "a low signal coming from Mr Walbert's right upper back area" according to his report. After further checking, this was confirmed to be a low-bandwidth but constant signal at around 288MHz. This is in the VHF band, used for commercial television, radio and other transmissions. There are plenty of portable devices which use this band, such as the micro-transmitters which let you listen to your MP3 player or your car radio. However, 288Mhz is in a wavelength reserved for military use in the US. It is employed for secure air-to-air and air-to-ground communications such as the HAVE QUICK system, which is almost universal in US military aircraft.

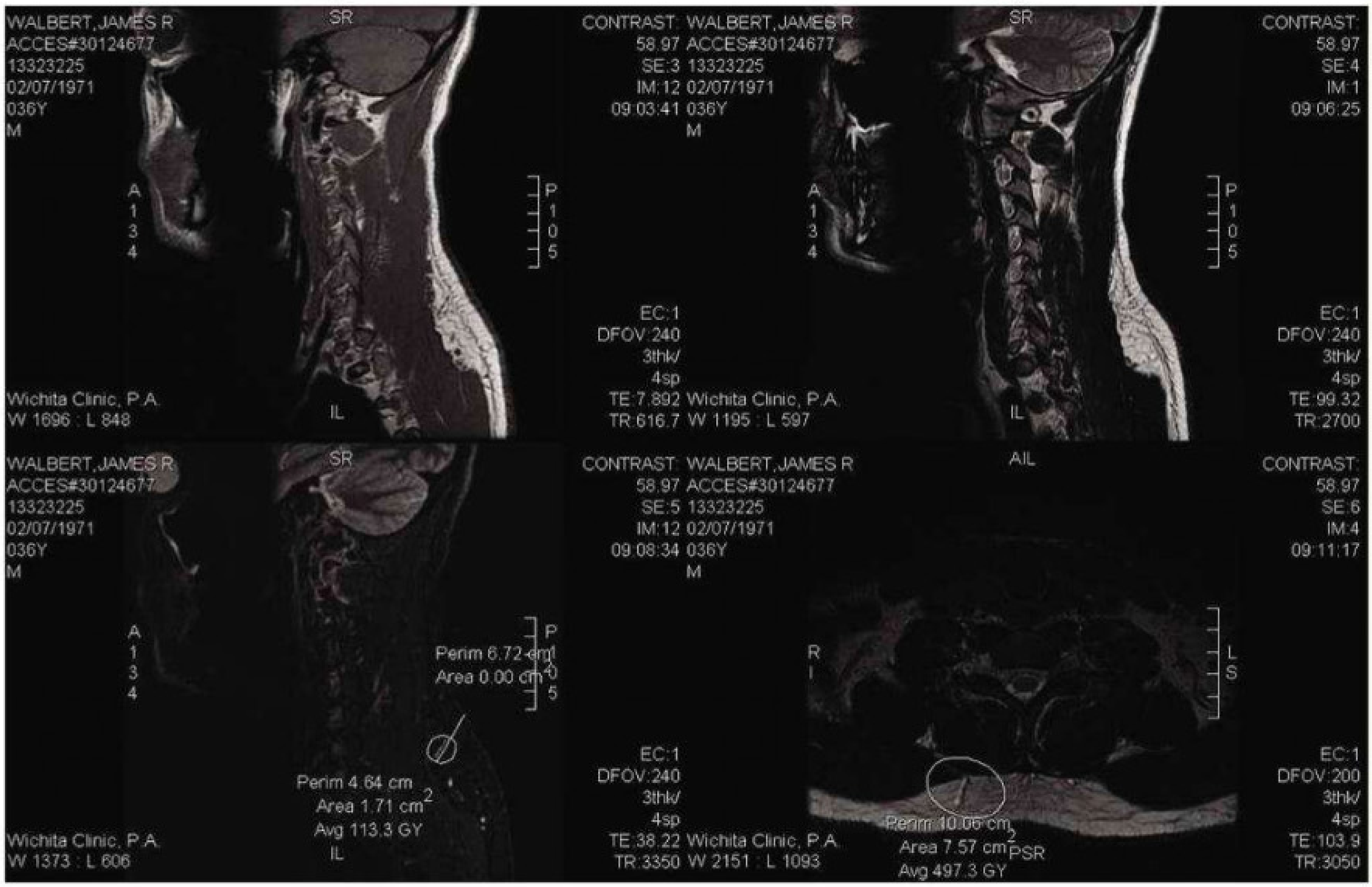
"I have seen similar signals in the past and just as recently as last month," Taylor told me. "I believe it can be used for both location, transmission and surveillance purposes."

The exact source of the transmission was identified with the aid of a Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scan, commonly used for getting very detailed images of a patient's body.

Dr John Hall of the Spine and Joint Institute in Texas has dealt with many patients who believe they are the victims of electronic harassment, from hearing voices to more obviously physical effects. He is in no doubt about Walbert's case, having studied the MRI scan, which in his view is "clearly showing a capsule-shaped foreign body in his right trapezius muscle".

How did Walbert come to be the victim of this type of harassment? Apparently, it started with an invention that Walbert patented in 2005. This was not a revolutionary power source that threatened the oil companies, but the 'Can-Kleen' – a vacuum-sealed covering that ensures the lid of a soft drink can stays clean and hygienic in spite of handling. Over a hundred billion cans of

TOP: A tiny tracking device using electronic technology to locate objects, animals – or people. **ABOVE:** James Walbert claims to have a device implanted in his body by a mysterious organisation.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ABOVE: MRI scans of James Walbert did reveal that something in his shoulder area was emitting signals – in a waveband exclusively reserved for the US military.

beverage are sold each year in the US alone, a nation that takes its hygiene very seriously. If the Can-Kleen took off, a royalty of a tenth of a cent per drink can, on a fraction of the cans sold, would be worth millions of dollars a year – forever.

Walbert got into a dispute over the Can-Kleen rights with a colleague. Such disputes sometimes escalate into lawsuits or even physical violence. Walbert believes this row led to his being drugged and illegally implanted with a device intended to force him to hand over his interest in the invention.

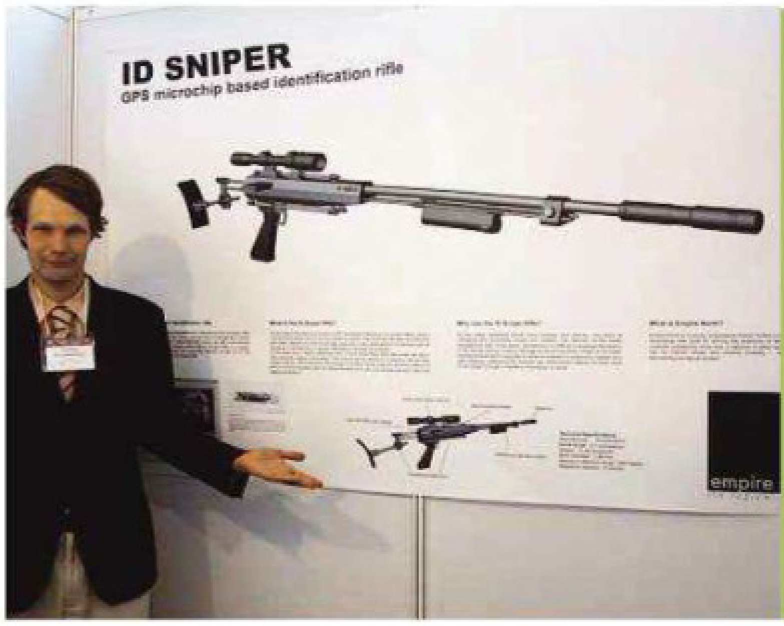
At first sight, this looks like a paranoid fantasy. The chips that are currently in use, like those implanted in pets (facing page; see 'Rover Come Home') do not emit signals themselves and can only be read from about a metre (3ft 3in) away, using a special scanner. Similar Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) chips are used for all sorts of commercial and industrial purposes, from tagging DVDs in the supermarket to pallets in a warehouse for stock control (**FT206:14**).

Commercial devices for tracking individuals are much bigger. The tagging of offenders is becoming more sophisticated: a satellite tracking scheme to monitor the movements of violent offenders with mental health problems is currently being tested with psychiatric patients on leave from Bethlem Royal Hospital, a secure hospital in south-east London. Newspaper articles might imply that the system allows minders to gaze down on their charges from spy satellites, in line with Hollywood's preferred way of depicting high-tech surveillance. In fact, the ankle tag works much more like a typical smart phone. It uses the satellite-based GPS system to establish its own location, and then contacts a central base via the mobile phone network and transmits this information. This way the location of the patient can be monitored continuously.

"It gives us confidence about the patient's whereabouts, that they're complying with their leave conditions," Professor Fahy, clinical director of forensic services at the South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust, told the BBC.[1] Orwellian as this type of tagging may sound, these are violent offenders with mental health problems, and there have been few objections.

SMARTWATER AND SPIKED SHAMPOO

An ankle tag is far larger that the implant in the Walbert case, but means of tagging a subject without them being aware are real enough. Security company SmartWater has a range of products used to mark property for later identification, and also for tagging people. According to their website, "The SmartWater Index Spray System will spray intruders with a water-based solution, which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GPS microchip based identification rifle
empire

JAKOB BOESKOV / KRISTIAN VON BENGTSSONS

CHIP SHOT

How do you get your subject to accept a chip implant in the first place? One proposed solution was the "ID Sniper Rifle", a special weapon from Danish outfit Empire North which fires a tracking chip into the target. The makers claim that it feels like a mosquito bite, and enables the tagged individual to be tracked thereafter. The device was unveiled at a police show in China in 2002, and received considerable media attention before anyone realised it was a hoax; or Art Project, depending on your point of view.

The ID Sniper Rifle concept was created by artist Jakob Boeskov and industrial designer Kristian von Bengtssons. as a satirical comment on our surveillance society. However, these things take on a life of their own. Having announced the hoax in 2004, gadget technology site Engadget ran another story about the weapon in 2007. And out there on the Internet, conspiracy theorists accept the ID Sniper Rifle as absolutely real!

contains a unique ‘forensic code’. This creates an irrefutable link between the criminal and the crime scene”.[2]

The spray is invisible but glows under ultraviolet light. According to the manufacturers, it cannot easily be washed off and will remain on hair, clothing and skin for weeks. The clever part is that the spray contains an identification code: any given spray can be uniquely traced back to a particular site, so the suspect cannot deny having been there. It’s a great solution for dealing with armed robbers or burglars. The Index Spray could also be used in any situation where you wanted to covertly tag someone, say attendees at a demonstration, a political rally or other event. If the authorities want to track you without your knowledge, they have the technology.

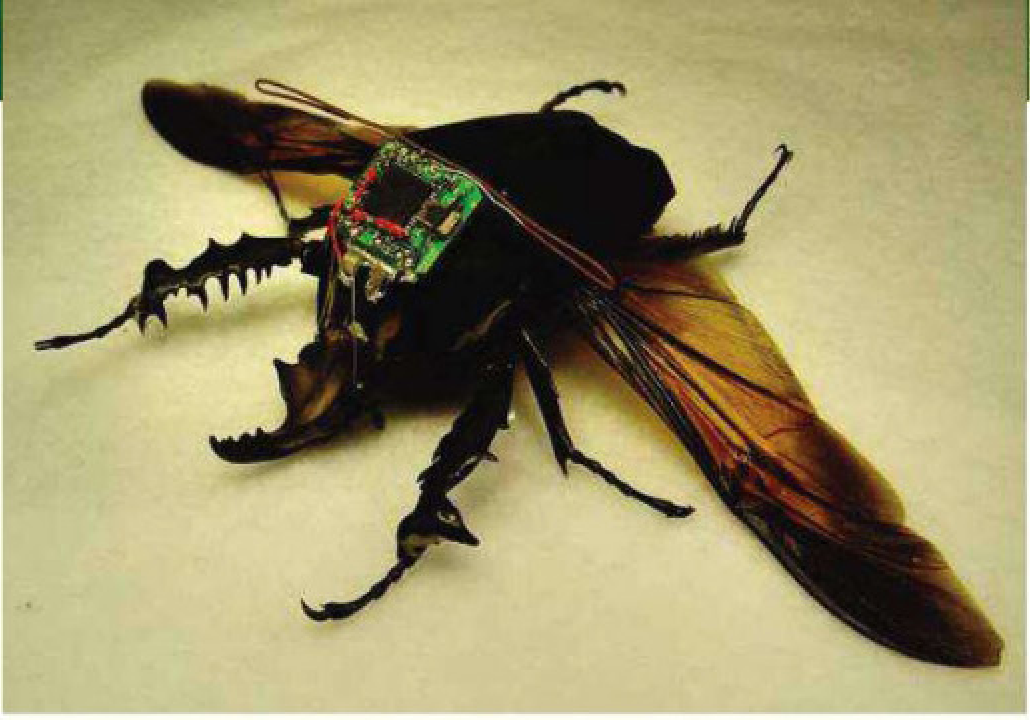
This approach is being adopted by the US Defense Threat Reduction Agency, set up to safeguard America from potential weapons of mass destruction. A recent report on technology being developed by the DTRA described an initiative to develop “Novel materials that could be applied to human hair, skin or other materials, via special lotions, soaps, or shampoos, to provide a persistent signature, and their corresponding detectors.”

The intention here appears to be to spike the suspect’s shampoo with something akin to SmartWater’s Index Spray, and use long-range sensors to track them. This might, for example, be based on an ultraviolet (UV) laser that produced very short pulses. These would cause the tagging material to respond with a flash which would be too faint for the human eye to detect but which could be easily visible to special cameras.

There is also a market in military and intelligence circles for radio frequency tagging devices – something much closer to what we see in the Walbert case. An idea of the current state of the art is suggested by reports from Afghanistan, where locals in the employ of the CIA have allegedly marked targets for drone strikes by placing tiny ‘beacons’, small enough to fit in the bottom of a cigarette packet. Such beacons can be left inconspicuously at the houses of insurgent leaders, allowing the CIA to pinpoint them.

The device is probably something very like the ‘Bigfoot Smart RF Tag’ produced by EWA Government Systems Inc (company motto: “Enabling a More Secure Future”). This is a miniature radio beacon, little larger than an AA battery, and is marketed for “high value target tagging missions” by intelligence agencies.[3] Leave one of these in your target’s room, and the CIA will have no trouble hitting the spot with a Hellfire missile from one of their fleet of Predator drones.

THESE MODIFIED INSECTS COULD COVERTLY CARRY MICROPHONES



COURTESY UC BERKELEY

LEFT: A real “bugging” device – a DARPA HI-MEMS cyborg beetle.

‘BUGGED’

While the implant in James Walbert’s shoulder appears to have a tracking function, it also seems to be affecting his nervous system. Toxicologist Dr Hildegarde Staninger says that Walbert’s implant is “interfering with his normal muscle stimulation and causing severe over-stimulation of site-specific muscle contractions, which interferes with his normal life and work activities”.

Walbert himself puts it more succinctly. “It feels like I’m being electrocuted all the time,” he told me. It also means he permanently has a metallic taste in his mouth. “It sucks.”

Electrodes with external power sources feature in pacemakers and devices to treat various brain conditions. But Dr Staninger suggests that this device might be self-powered. He refers to work on tiny generators which harvest energy from the motion around them, based on materials which generate an electric potential in response to force. A 2009 project with these piezoelectric materials carried out at Case Western Reserve University showed that an implantable device could be inserted in the quadriceps of a rabbit, which could harvest enough energy for nerve stimulation. By stimulating the muscles to keep them moving, and so charge itself, such a device could keep going indefinitely.[4] Such technology could be used to power implanted medical devices.

It turns out that there is a government project to do something very much like what Walbert claims has happened to him. In a programme called HI-MEMS, the US

ROVER COME HOME

GETTY IMAGES / CHINA PHOTOS

Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) chips track everything from shipping containers to car parts to DVDs in shops (**FT206:14**). They are also now routinely implanted into pets. A central database means that if your Staffie or Bengal cat goes missing, it can easily be identified by a vet with a chip scanner, and swiftly returned.

This is good news for forteans – at last – there is a way of validating that old staple, a pet which finds its way back home after travelling hundreds or thousands of miles. Previously, such returnees might simply have been lookalikes with an eye for free accommodation.

It also gives rise to a completely new class of tale: the wandering pet that ends up a ridiculous distance away from where it is supposed to be. These include Lucy the collie who disappeared in Cornwall and showed up in East Lothian over 500 miles (800km) away, Kitty the black-and white cat who seems to have teleported (or hitchhiked?) from Lancashire to Enfield, and Henry, who went from Swansea to Coventry.

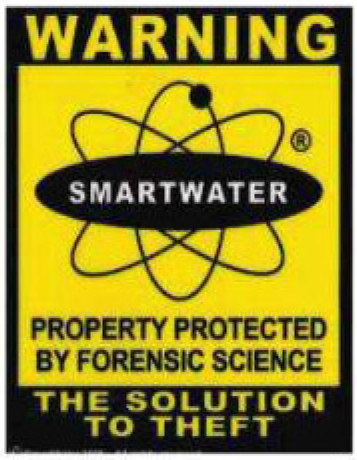
The downside with this technology is that it can lead to disputes between the original owner and the new owner, who may have had the animal for months or even years before the microchip was found.

To track your pet in real-time, miniature GPS tracking devices like the PAT micro are now becoming available. Like ankle tags for prisoners, these use GPS and mobile phone tech to send updates on the animal’s location. When implantable tracking chips are available, pets will probably be among the first recipients.

Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) aims to create remote-controlled cyborgs by the use of multi-functional implanted microchips.[5]

Bizarrely enough, HI-MEMS research is not looking at humans or even mammals: the aim is to produce modified insects which will be directed to covertly sniff out chemical weapons or carry a microphone, giving a whole new meaning to the term "bugging device". The technology will be based on an implant which would harvest energy via a "biological fuel cell". As well as powering communications, this energy would be used to steer the insect towards a target, either by direct stimulation of muscles, nerve stimulation or some other approach. As the DARPA site puts it: "The HI-MEMS program is aimed to develop technology that provides more control over insect locomotion, just as saddles and horseshoes are needed for horse locomotion control." Because of the size of the hosts, the system will necessarily be miniaturised to chip scale right from the start.

The work on cyborg insects is still in its early days (as far as we know). When mature, it could in principle be used to track and control all sorts of other animals. Including, perhaps, human beings.



ELECTRONIC HARASSMENT

Walbert has no idea where his device came from, but suspects that there may be government or military involvement. It's hard to imagine anyone else having the technology; quite how and why it came to be used against him are difficult questions to answer, but *FT* readers will be aware of precedents.

Having accumulated a sufficient amount of expert testimony, Walbert has also gained some political backing. State Representative Jim Guest has sent him letters of support, and has spoken out in support of other victims of electronic harassment. Guest introduced a Bill into the Missouri legislature to make "coerced subcutaneous implantation of an identification device" an offence.

The next move is for Walbert to have the implant removed, though at present he finds that doctors are hesitant to do so. This may not be a matter of conspiracy so much as an understandable reluctance to deal with a case outside their experience. Surgery can be a very litigious business in the US. The safe removal of self-powered piezoelectric devices is not routine surgery. Even if the chip does not have an anti-tamper device, there's a risk the operation might leave significant damage.

If the implant can be successfully removed, proving where it came from is another matter. Walbert believes he must have been drugged when it was implanted and has no memory of the event. There is no way of linking it to an individual. And Walbert believes he may have other implants too.

The only way to maintain our comfortable view of a world where these things simply cannot happen, is to challenge some of the expert testimony. Isn't Walbert just crazy? Mental health experts don't think so. Is there really an implant? The MRI shows it in place. Is it really affecting or tracking him? It's producing a detectable output, and something is causing those muscle spasms.

You could dismiss any or all of the experts and insist on a second opinion from others. But are you simply going to ask different people until they give you the 'right' answer and confirm your preconception? It's a case which challenges our standards of proof. Perhaps we need to turn the question around: what does James Walbert need to do to prove he really is the victim of an illegal implant?

The mainstream media will not be covering this sort of story for a while. It smacks too much of the lunatic fringe and tinfoil hats for any news editor to go near it. But there is a gradual convergence here. The technology of MRI scans and radiofrequency detectors means that the presence of implants is becoming easier to verify. And the technology of implantable chips is a growing medical speciality, not a science fiction fantasy. The day may be coming when the mainstream accepts that the sort of harassment Walbert reports is a genuine possibility.

However, by that time we will be living in a world where you can be tracked by your shampoo, medical implants will be monitoring your health, and wired-up insects will be able to listen in to your conversations. And Walbert's story will go from being too wildly speculative to being too routine to be worth reporting. FT

NOTES

1 http://bbc.in/cdX6O9 (BBC).

2 http://bit.ly/ghoRYA (smartwater.com).

3 http://bit.ly/hP65ie (ewa-gsi.com) (PDF).

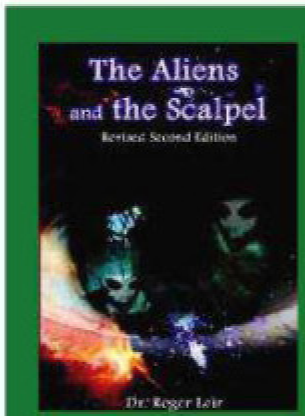
4 "Annals of Biomedical engineering, *In Vivo* Demonstration of a Self-Sustaining, Implantable, Stimulated-Muscle-Powered Piezoelectric Generator Prototype", http://bit.ly/i5AxvA (springerlink.com)

5 http://bit.ly/88ioON (darpa.mil).

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

DAVID HAMBLING is a freelance journalist and a regular *FT* contributor. He is the author of *Weapons Grade: Revealing the Links Between Modern Warfare and Our High-Tech World* (Constable, 2005).

ALIEN IMPLANTS?



This isn't the first time that people have claimed that they are the unwilling victims of implants. Many readers will remember the great days of the 1990s when contactees claimed that extraterrestrials had surgically implanted devices inside them for tracking or communication. There was a wave of excitement over the possibility that these implants would provide hard evidence of alien technology; they were even featured in *The X-Files television series*.

However, the implants themselves proved elusive. Some seemed to evaporate on removal from the body. Analysis tended to show normal biological origin – bits of the patient's own body. In one case, the 'implant' analysed by Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston was found to be connective tissue, collagen, and some external cotton fibres. Such calcified tissue can be produced in reaction to a foreign body such as a splinter; here the tissue included fibres, apparently from the victim's underwear.[1]

Metallic implants may also have more prosaic origins than Zeta Reticuli. When Dr Susan Backmore was given a 2mm x 3mm "implant" from an abductee's mouth to study, she took it to various colleagues in the physical sciences who submitted it to a battery of tests. The conclusion was that its composition – mercury 40 per cent, tin 30 per cent and silver 16 per cent – was a close match for dental amalgam. The 'implant' was a bit of tooth filling which had come loose.[2]

Dr Roger Leir has removed at least 14 objects alleged to be alien implants from patients; he says that some of them have emitted radio signals, or moved to avoid being extracted, and that lab analysis suggests they may be extraterrestrial. However, Dr Leir has not had any success in persuading others of his beliefs. Some of the published analyses describe mysterious irregular nanoscale structures, fibres and crystals, and anomalous isotope distributions. To some, these suggest an alien technology beyond our comprehension; but they might equally be mundane fragments of Earth material subjected to overly hopeful scrutiny. Of course, alien implants might be too advanced for us to make sense of, but the lack of anything that looks convincingly like manufactured objects has meant that implants have failed to make it as more than a footnote in ufology.

However, there is now a possibility that there will be a revival of the implant idea, perhaps with the new twist that the implanting was not carried out by aliens, but by secret military/intelligence organisations.

NOTES

1 http://tinyurl.com/2fecpdc (openminds.tv) (PDF).

2 http://tinyurl.com/2bjm5nbw (susanblackmore.co.uk).

Media mediums

MIKITA BROTTMAN follows the latest fads, fashions and psychic styles in metaphysical media and tells us who's hot and who's not amongst celebrity clairvoyants.

Although traditional church attendance has been waning for a long time, interest in the spirit world remains consistently strong. A 2005 Gallup poll found that while roughly three in four Americans profess a belief in the paranormal, only one in four regularly attends church. Such statistics suggest our fascination with the Other Side remains steady, though the appeal of particular clairvoyants, like that of all public figures, is subject to the unpredictable ebb and flow of fashion.

> A poll found that about three in four Americans say they believe in the paranormal

Here in the US, we have ridden out the powerful but short-lived wave of West Indian psychics which reached its height in 2001, when pay-per-call clairvoyants – most of them charging 99 cents a minute – were shilling themselves everywhere you looked. Particularly memorable was Dionne Warwick's "Psychic Friends Network", well known for both its omnipresent infomercials and its well publicised bankruptcy case. Equally notorious was the exotic Miss Cleo, who succeeded Warwick as queen of the late-night soothsayers ("Cleo can see Into your Heart and Into your Life"). Miss Cleo's fall was equally swift, and resulted from legal pressure exerted on her employers, the Psychic Readers Network, by State attorneys-general and the Fair Trade Commission. The charge was fraudulent advertising: turns out a lot of those calls cost a *lot* more than 99¢ a minute. Particularly dismaying was the news, leaked during the investigation, that the sultry Miss Cleo – née Youree Dell Harris – was in fact born in Los Angeles to American parents, and was not remotely Jamaican, as both she and her accent had led us to believe.

While lesser mystics might regard this as something of a setback, it was not enough to dissuade the indefatigable Miss Cleo, who now describes herself as a "proud voodoo woman". Although she no longer advertises her services on television, Miss Cleo continues to offer private consultations from her home in Lake Worth, Florida, and – at least until recently – hosted her own podcast, V Radio (V for voodoo). Her longevity puts Miss Cleo among the older rank of US media clairvoyants, beside such well-known figures as spirit communicator James Van Praagh, and Shanti Ananda, the Puerto Rican psychic formerly known as Walter Mercato. Although most of these senior seers are still with us – the unctuous Sylvia Browne was making occasional appearances on *Montel Williams* and *Larry King Live* until recently – they have largely been usurped by a wave of younger, more telegenic and web-savvy sages, most of whom have their own cable shows, websites, and blogs.

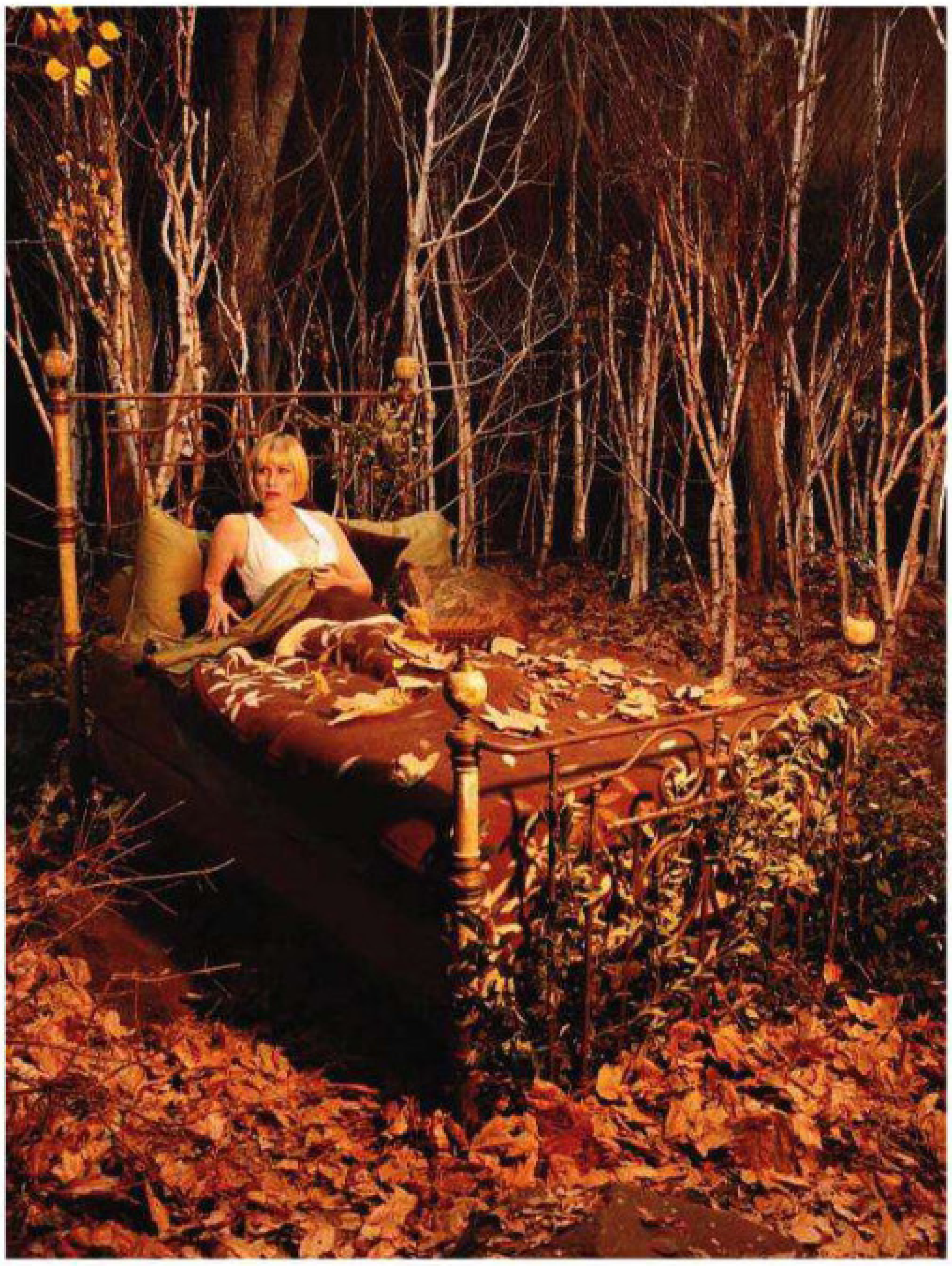
Until just a few years ago, the king of the new clairvoyants was the charismatic John Edward, whose show *Crossing Over* – a major success on the Sci Fi (now Syfy) Channel – was rapidly snapped up for syndication. Yet despite his blue eyes, casual demeanour and gym-rat physique, Edward, once described by the *New York Times* as "the Oprah of the Other Side", seems, at the tender age of 41, to have passed his psychic sell-by date. His new show, *John Edward Cross Country* ("world-famous psychic John Edward travels cross-

WWW.SONYAFITZPATRICK.COM

LEFT: Sonya Fitzpatrick, popular pet psychic, seen here with some four-legged friends.

country helping families reconnect with their departed loved ones") has, for the past three years, aired on WE TV – a channel whose programming is largely aimed at women – but has been on hiatus since 2009, and has shown no signs of returning from the dead.

Since 2005, fans of psychic phenomena have been drawn to the television series *Medium* ("She Sees What Others Can't"), starring Patricia Arquette as clairvoyant Allison Dubois. Although the show is fictional, its plotlines are apparently based closely on the work of the real Allison Dubois, a 38-year-old shaman whose psychic abilities are allegedly put to work by law enforcement agencies all across the United States. Cancelled by NBC after five seasons, the show was then picked up by CBS in fall 2009; its ratings at CBS, however, were consistently low, and it was announced in November that the show would be cancelled after the end of the seventh season.



LEFT: *Medium* featured Patricia Arquette as a fictional psychic. **BELOW:** Miss Cleo, one-time queen of the late night soothsayers. **BOTTOM:** John Edwards seems to have vanished from the airwaves – will he return from the dead?

Those seeking spiritual guidance through the airwaves have always been spoiled for choice. Currently, subscribers to the Sirius network can listen to *Angels on Call* with Mary O – full name, Mary Rose Occino – star of the SyFy Channel reality show *Mary Knows Best* and proprietor of the Celestial Whispers gift shop on Long Island. Sirius also plays host to *Animal Intuition* with Sonya Fitzpatrick, a genteel English lady who is not only able to communicate with still-living animals, but who also possesses the ability to contact pets that have passed on. On her now-defunct show *The Pet Psychic*, which once aired twice-weekly on the cable channel Animal Planet, Mrs Fitzpatrick studied worn photographs of deceased cats, dogs, and guinea pigs in order to let their owners know what their ex-pets have been up to on the other side. And for listeners on the West Coast, a part-Cherokee actress and singer named Danielle Egnew channels angelic entities on her LA Talk Radio show *Haunted Playground*.

Multi-talented though these mystics may be, none of them can hold a candle to the current Queen of all Mediums, 37-year-old Lisa Williams. In contrast to frumpy, fashion-challenged spiritualists like Sylvia Browne and Doris Stokes, Williams, a stylish young British woman, presents herself as fun, flirty and informal. Her spiky hair is teased into coloured streaks, and her blog shows her sitting in her pyjamas with a laptop on her knee. In her show *Lisa Williams: Life Among the Dead*, which ran from 2006 to 2007 on The Lifetime Channel, the cameras followed Lisa on a "typical day" as she communicated with the deceased, investigated haunted houses, and conducted other spirit-seeking activities. Her most recent show, *Lisa Williams: Voices From the Other Side* ran for five consecutive nights in October 2008, also on the Lifetime Channel. She has also appeared on *Oprah!* and claims to have been visited by a number of dead celebrities, including Bob Hope, Princess Diana, Natalie Wood, Marilyn Monroe and Ray Charles.

Despite her trendy appearance, there is nothing modern about Lisa Williams's performance (I saw her in Baltimore on 20 November 2010). As with similar clairvoyants, her show consists of identifying details of her audience's recently deceased relatives. Although many of these tidbits are predictably vague, her hits are sometimes remarkably on-target. For example, in Baltimore she asked one woman whether her dead mother had "taught her cat to use the toilet". "Oh, that was her dog," the woman replied. "She taught it to pee in the shower". Once the connection has been firmly established between the presenting spirit and his or her worldly descendents, Williams dispenses love, forgiveness, and a little worldly wisdom (one lady was advised from beyond the grave to "get her transmission checked out"). If the details do not match or if advice seems confusing, the loved ones are instructed to "let it sit for a while", to see if anything comes to mind.

If the make-up of the Baltimore audience was any indicator, Lisa's fans are predominantly women, accompanied by a few bored-looking boyfriends (including mine). Many of her fans were already clutching tissues even before Lisa arrived on stage, which suggests there is an enormous need for the comfort such performers can bring. This impression is confirmed by a glance at Lisa's chatty and colourful blog, where each entry is followed by grateful comments, almost all of them from women: "Thank you for sharing your journey with us and giving us all inspiration in our own lives"; or "Thank you so much for a wonderful evening and for bringing such peace and well-being to so many. Your energy was contagious and brought so much happiness."

GETTY IMAGES / EVAN AGOSTINI

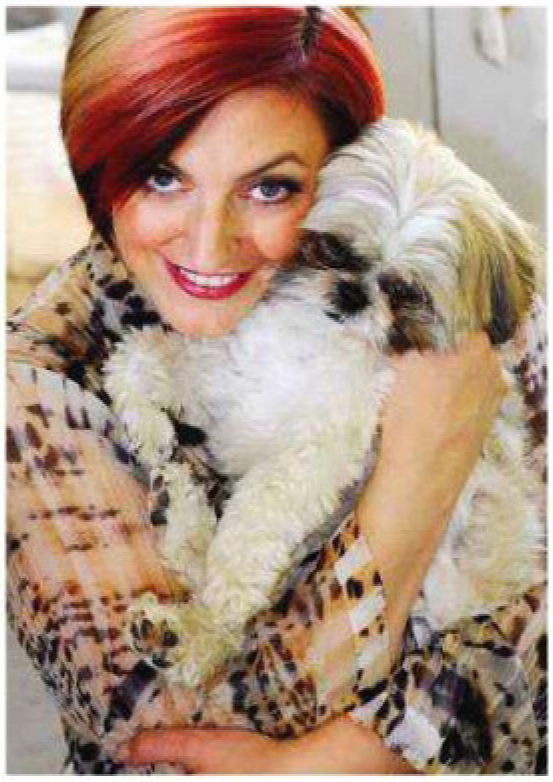
GETTY IMAGES / EXPRESS NEWSPAPERS

PA PHOTOS

ABOVE LEFT: Spritiualist Doris Stokes travelled widely. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Sybil Leek claimed to be from a long line of witches. **BELOW:** Lisa Williams has a popular TV show.

Like many clairvoyants, Lisa Williams believes her psychic powers are inherited. "My grandmother, Frances Glazebrook from Birmingham, had these powers too," she reveals on her blog. In her transatlantic popularity, Williams is part of another tradition – that of British psychics, usually female, who are popular on both sides of the pond. Pet psychic Sonya Fitzpatrick was born in England and lived in London until 1991, when she moved to the US with her husband. Before Fitzpatrick, the *mystic du jour* was Rosemary Altea, "Voice of the Spirit World", another popular British-born clairvoyant who appeared on numerous national television shows including *The Oprah Show*, *Larry King Live* and *Prime Time Live* with Diane Sawyer. Altea's predecessor was the ghastly and garrulous Doris Stokes (1920–1987), a grey-haired, grandmotherly figure associated with the Spiritualist church. Although Stokes was based in England, she often travelled to Australia and the US, and even helped out the LAPD with a murder case (or so she claimed). Her main psychic rival was a lady with the Dickensian name of Sybil Leek, who claimed descent from a line of witches going back to the 16th century. Leek moved to the US in 1964 and began collaborating with the Austrian-born parapsychologist Hans Holzer, who invited her to join him in his investigations into haunted houses and psychic phenomena. The duo went on to host numerous TV and radio programmes on the subject, continuing to collaborate until Leek's death in 1982.

Like many other clairvoyants, Lisa Williams believes she inherited her pschic powers



WWW.LISAWILLIAMS.COM

When watching Lisa Williams's stage performance, I began to wonder why British ladies make such popular and successful psychics. Perhaps their genteel accents harken back to the heyday of Victorian spiritualism, the era of séances, ectoplasm and Ouija boards. Or perhaps they fit the archetype of the magical English nanny embodied by characters like Mary Poppins and Nanny McPhee, a stock character closely related to those dotty British aunts played in the movies by the likes of Maggie Smith and Margaret Rutherford. Or maybe there is a connection to the tradition of Celtic witchcraft, passed along from Morgan-le-Fay, Vivian, the Lady of the Lake and other mythical mystics. Interestingly, these traditions pre-date Christianity, which perhaps explains why, although mediums and clairvoyants will often discuss various planes of the afterlife, there is never any mention of Heaven or Hell, let alone any reference to the existence (or otherwise) of God.

But back to Lisa Williams, who, although she may have brought hope to countless loved ones, has seen a run of bad fortune in her own not-so-private life. She is separated from the father of her child, and her marriage came to an end in 2009. But things are currently looking up. In her latest blog entry – posted on 10 December 2010 – Lisa has revealed that she is now in a same-sex relationship. If this revelation gives you a sense of *déjà vu*, it's probably because she is far from the first psychic to have "Crossed Over" in this way. Miss Cleo – or Ms Cleo, as she is now known – came out in *The Advocate* in 2006, and now describes herself as a lesbian activist. Danielle Agnew, host of *Haunted Playground*, is also openly gay, as are psychics Terry Iacuzzo, James Van Praagh, and Colin Fry. The correlation between psychic gifts and homosexuality, however, remains open to speculation. Could it just be one of those things that, in the words of HP Lovecraft, "man was not meant to know"? **FT**

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

MIKITA BROTTMAN is an author, critic and psychoanalyst. She is a professor of humanities at the Maryland College of Art in Baltimore. Her most recent book is *The Solitary Vice: Against Reading* (Counterpoint, 2008).

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SLIDERS

HILARY EVANS has been collecting accounts of streetlight interference for years, and concludes that far from being folklore or 'friend-of-a-friend' tales, cases in which people have the ability to turn off street lamps as they walk past are a genuine scientific mystery. Here, in an extract from the first book devoted to the subject, he presents a number of first-hand reports from 'SLIders' around the world. Photos by ETIENNE GILFILLAN.

Dear Hilary, What an absolutely ridiculous and outrageous idea! – Except that it has been happening to me for several years, and I thought I was the only one! – Keith B, Arroyo Grande, California.

Streetlight Interference (SLI) is an alleged phenomenon in which it is claimed that certain people, passing near a streetlight at night, cause it to spontaneously extinguish (or if off, come on). Although there are hundreds of reports by both SLIders and witnesses, the subject remains controversial. Though trivial at first glance, closer study shows SLI to be a complex process, rich in paradoxes and contradictions. If true, however, the claims carry profound and exciting implications for science and for our knowledge of human potential.

People respond to Streetlight Interference with amusement or amazement, with belief, disbelief, or relief at learning that it happens to others as well as to themselves. SLI takes many different forms, and people react to it in many different ways. The best way to discover what happens when SLI occurs is to have it happen to you. For those of us who have not had the benefit of personal experience, though, the next best way is to learn what SLIders say happened to them. Jane de la R, a SLIder from Surrey, England, reports:

When living in London, I was able to do it almost at will – I have as witnesses my husband and a large group of friends who, over the years, came to regard my ability as an endearing trait.

A ridiculous idea? An endearing trait? SLI experiencers react in every sort of way when it happens to them. A few more accounts:

Jeff F, a self-employed salesman from Illinois:

The most recent event occurred just before Christmas, in a shopping mall near my home. There were a great many lights in the lot: it was snowing that evening. One went out as we got out of the car. My children and I exclaimed, "We got one" as we usually do. On our way out, the same light went out again. We started driving around the lot looking for another "victim". We would pick out the ones that looked a little dimmer and drive under them. If it did not go out right away, we would wait or yell POW (just for effect, I think) until we were able to knock out around six, including the same one three times.

Another incident occurred in Indianapolis. I just happened to be discussing this phenomenon with a couple of business friends over a drink. One of them had witnessed this on a prior occasion. The other, of course, thought we were nuts. When we went to the parking lot to get to our car, I got one. We all laughed at the "coincidence". As we were driving to a restaurant and waiting at a stop light, another went out. More laughter *from us as we just converted another non-believer!*

Not many SLIders get to where they can play games with their ability, but this account brings out the take-it-for-granted attitude that long-term SLIders frequently adopt. Few SLIders are worried or disturbed, even when they come to realise that they differ from most folk in doing what they do.

Dan C, a young man from Harrogate, Yorkshire:

My experience of SLI started in 1991, when I was 19. I was walking back from my girlfriend's house after a night out followed by a smooching session at her house. It was summertime, in the small hours of the morning, and quite cold. I was walking through an open park lit by old-fashioned, ornate streetlights when the nearest light-post to the footpath went out as I approached. I thought nothing of it except "the bulb has gone". The very same thing happened the following night, and again I dismissed it as a dodgy bulb and thought nothing of it until it happened the next time I passed – at which point I started to think something was up.

Over the months, as I returned home from my girlfriend's house, the light would always do the opposite as to its original state, i.e. if it was off it would turn on and vice versa. After I'd passed the light-post, it would usually revert to its original state – I would usually be over 100m [330ft] from it when it did this. On the approach, it would vary from 60m [200ft] to 10m [33ft] past the post before it would turn on or off.

I told my friends about the situation, and to silence the sceptics and piss-takers I took them past the light-post one dark evening. Sods' law! Nothing happened, not even a flicker.

It wasn't until I noticed I had the same effect on other light-posts that I noticed the conditions for the "light-post thing" to happen. That is, it was usually late at night (after 9pm, say), dark, quite chilly. And my state of mind. Usually I would be quite tired, on edge, nervous of my surroundings (fear of mugging, I suppose) and I reckon my adrenalin levels must have been up. This sort of explains why I couldn't 'perform' in front of my friends, having been in a relaxed situation. I have since shut my friends up as I have shown my ability on more than one occasion. I can only think that the cause is over-active brain waves, a result of my nervous emotions...

This account is typical of the way a SLIder gradually comes to realise that something out of the ordinary is going on. Also characteristic is that it slowly dawns on him that his state of mind is a crucial factor.

Richard M, a professional magician from London:

The moment I saw the header of the article in the Independent *I knew exactly what it was about, as I have experienced this on a number of occasions. The first time I realised something was happening was when I was about 17–18. (I am now 32) and I was taking my dog for a walk. I noticed that lights were going out when we walked under them and then flickering back on when we had passed. It was only noticeable because of the number involved. It didn't frighten me but I became conscious of it. I remember walking under them trying to make them go out but I couldn't. The moment I stopped willing it to happen, it would start again – like someone catching me out. I sort of anticipated it for a while and didn't really tell anyone about it. A few years ago, I noticed it happening again – the first time for a long time. Again, I was with my dog and this time we turned out a number of lights in a car park across the road. I told a close friend when I got home and he came out to watch from the other side of the road. As we walked around the park, they all went out as we passed under them, and then came back on when we had moved away. I was so chuffed that it had happened while he was watching. I seem to recall that both periods coincided with stress, some of it quite intense.*

"Streetlights dim and go off at night, sometimes very quickly"

Later, he wrote to tell us that he had just been on holiday to New Zealand with his girlfriend and turned out lights in Auckland. As a professional magician, he takes a special interest in the phenomenon, and speculates as to whether it could be anything like the feats associated with Israeli wonderworker Uri Geller, but he still finds them puzzling.

Diana B, an office worker from Texas:

Streetlights dim and go off at night, sometimes very slowly, sometimes very quickly. Streetlights go on in the full sunshine at times, when I come close to them. I have had periods in my life when several appliances broke down, just one after the other. Regular light bulbs will also come on or go off when I am around, either in people's homes, or in restaurants – same thing with fluorescent lights.

I have had electronic garage doors open on me twice, once at my house in Lexington, Kentucky, another time in my home in Ocala, Florida. The garage doors would open about halfway and then go up and down rather quickly in a crazy way until the energy dissipated and ran out. If I am on really high energy, which I am about half the time, I can hold a compass and the needle will go crazy and just go around and around, until I let go of the compass. I also periodically have a tremendous amount of trouble with my hand-held tape recorder. It will stop recording, but is still capable of playing back. I went through about 10 of them over a period of a couple of months. Once it was so bad it even wiped out what was on the tape.

At other times, several of the fuses and lights in my car will blow. Once I was really excited. I was in my travel trailer at the time and when I reached out to turn on a light, there was like blue lightning running through the little bulbs (two of them) and a fuse blew, and all the DC lights in the trailer went out. I also can get very charged with static electricity, so much so that sparks actually fly around me and if anyone else is close by, the sparks will connect with them. I used to have the same sort of problems with an IBM copying machine, and they had to spray the floor with anti-static stuff to keep it from happening. Like everybody else, I have no control over it. It would be quite spectacular if we could, don't you think?

ETIENNE GILFILLAN

Here we see an interesting aspect of SLI: that many SLIders also affect other appliances besides streetlights. But they don't *all* do so – one of the many puzzling features of the phenomenon. This SLIder is unusual in that her SLI functions in broad daylight. Streetlights being nocturnal creatures, few SLIders get the chance to find this out.

The experience of Jorgen S, a Norwegian SLIder, brings out some other features of the phenomenon:

One time, I was driving in a tunnel in a traffic line (very slowly) and five lights went out one after another as I drove beneath them.

This tells us that the lights do not need to be in the open: a tunnel is fine, so long as the light can "see" the SLIder. The incident is a classic instance of lights going out in sequence, and the fact that he was driving in a traffic line emphasises that it was him, and none of the others, who was affecting the lights.

Most SLI events are spontaneous, but sometimes SLIders can use their will power to dramatic effect:

Margie H, a housewife from Birmingham, West Midlands:

On a visit to Ireland, I was walking with some members of my family, and we were discussing paranormal happenings. I was telling my mother about the streetlights that I turn off outside our home, and she was laughing at me while I was talking, then a streetlight went out. She was a bit taken aback but said it must have been coincidence.

Well, I decided to show off a bit, so I said, "Watch this then." By this time we had walked on a few yards and the light had gone on again (as they usually do for me). As I walked back and approached the light it went off again. Well, she was incredulous.

I was delighted it happened, as it bore out my story. When we got back to my sister's house, a bulb went as we walked in the door. You can imagine the reaction.

Some people do SLI only during a brief period of their lives:

Geraldine O, an English electrical design engineer:

In November 1992, it was the first anniversary of my mother's death. After work, I have to walk about a quarter of a mile from the British Rail station to the car park. The most direct route is down a narrow, well-lit alley which leads to a flight of wooden stairs down to the beginning of the car park. As I descended the stairs and started to walk along the first section of the car park, one of the sodium streetlights illuminating the area winked out. This same light went out on the next four evenings, going out at a greater distance each time, the last two or three times seemingly coincided with me thinking about it going out. I did not wait for the light to restrike. Each time, I left it in an extinguished state. After five days, the SLI effect stopped as suddenly as it had started, although nothing about the weather, time of day, temperature had changed dramatically that I can recall.

"As I walked back and approached the light, it went off again"

An unusual detail of this account is that she believes the extinction coincided with her thinking about it. As we have already seen, SLI generally "refuses" to happen when the SLIder is thinking about it or willing it to happen.

This selection of reports brings out many of the typically recurring features of SLI, but SLIders can pull many other tricks from their bag.

And the cause? Sergio Q, a product engineer from the US, writes:

This has been happening to me for as long as I can remember. At first I thought it was a sign from God or some other spiritual being, but to my disappointment I found the SLI website and a possible scientific explanation.

He should be so lucky! What are we to make of this activity, which our correspondent from Arroyo Grande rightly describes as "ridiculous", which seems to serve no purpose, which benefits no one, and which is a tiresome nuisance for civil authorities (though not a very serious one)? And let's add: which doesn't seem to add to our knowledge of how the Universe works or how people behave? Which appears to happen out of the blue, with no rhyme or reason, no deep emotional repercussions or ill effects? With no meaning, so far as we can tell, yet which, because we have been brought up to believe that *everything* has a meaning, challenges us for just that reason?

If anything like this has ever happened to you, you are probably curious to know what is going on. If it has never happened to you, you may be curious to know why other people think it happens. If you are of a sceptical cast of mind, you will be intrigued by the whodunit aspect, and look for simple, natural explanations to dissolve the mystery. If you are a tease-the-experts kind of person, you will be entertained by something that seems to be happening even though conventional science says it can't. For SLI is a fascinating puzzle, as challenging as a Rubik Cube and at the same time as addictive as a detective story.

People experience SLI in many different ways. For some it is a frequent occurrence, for others it is rare, even once-in-a-lifetime. Sometimes only one light is affected; others affect a sequence. The SLIder may be walking, cycling, or in a car; close to the light or at a fair distance; alone or with others. The only common factor is that a streetlight is somehow affected, seemingly by the approach or the presence of the SLIder.

SLI is not a local phenomenon: it happens the world over. We have reports from the Americas and the Caribbean, western and eastern Europe, Scandinavia and Atlantic islands, Asia and Australia. The similarity of these reports shows that SLI follows much the same pattern wherever it occurs. And whether in Boston or Budapest, Manchester or Melbourne, the same question arises: what's so special about streetlights?

Well, perhaps they aren't so special. SLI is only one of a range of experiences that take place in the borderland between the physical and the mental. What is happening is unquestionably a physical effect – the switching off or on of an electrical gadget – yet at the same time it seems to be a mental effect, in that though this switching happens spontaneously, it evidently requires the presence of an individual human, often in an exceptional state of mind. There are other types of extraordinary phenomena in which people appear to influence external objects in unusual ways, but SLI is unique in that it involves highly visible objects, located in public places, where any kind of tinkering with the object is so improbable that we can reasonably ignore it. It isn't something that happens in the privacy of a home or the isolation of a laboratory. SLI is not hearsay or legend or rumour. It isn't something that happened to a friend-of-a-friend. SLI happens to real people with names and addresses – and is seen to happen.

In this, SLI is unique and can reasonably be regarded as a phenomenon in its own right. Confirming this, we have the testimony of hundreds of people, whom we have no reason to doubt. Even if it should turn out that a few are telling lies, or making up stories, or exaggerating, the fact that so many people have put themselves through the trouble of reporting their experience – people from all walks of life, from many countries – makes it hard to believe that they are deceiving us or themselves.

They could be wrong in the way they interpret their experience, but that *something* is happening, there is no doubt. Even if the witnesses *are* deluded, such a widespread delusion would be of interest as a social phenomenon.

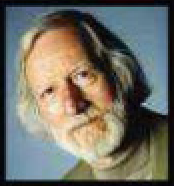
That said, we have many reasons to think that those who report SLI are *not* deluded. What we are studying is indeed a scientific enigma.

But *which* science? The probable answer is several disciplines working together. What happens to the lights is surely a matter for the engineer or the physicist, but what *causes* it to happen seems rather a matter for the psychologist. And they will probably need to enlist the services of the anthropologist and the parapsychologist who have direct, first-hand experience of anomalous behaviour. The hard scientists will do well to recognise that they can benefit from the experience of those who have studied magic and folk belief in indigenous cultures and of psychical researchers who have done their best to elucidate anomalous behaviour.

Could it be that this is precisely the message of SLI: that it is trying to tell us that the world of mere matter and the world of the mind are not as distinct as we think? We do not have to suppose that SLI is a psychic happening, or that it is in any way supernatural. But we do have to consider the possibility that SLI is showing us a wider potential of the mind, a deeper interaction between mind and matter. **FT**

Adapted and extracted from Hilary Evans: Sliders: The Enigma of Streetlight Interference, Anomalist Books, San Antonio, New York, 2010, www.anaomalistbooks.com

Author biography



HILARY EVANS is the author of numerous books on paranormal subjects, and with his late wife founded the Mary Evans Picture Library.

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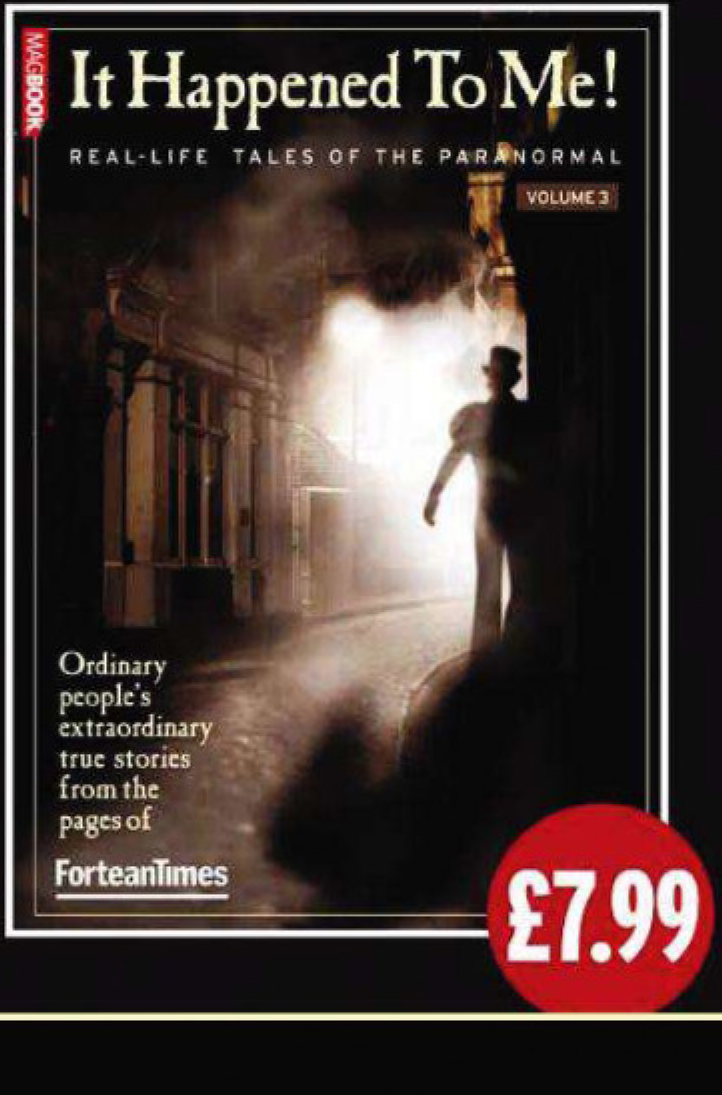
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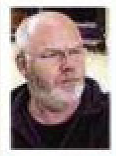
Breaking convention

An upcoming conference marks a psychedelic renaissance for the 21st century, says **ANDY ROBERTS**.

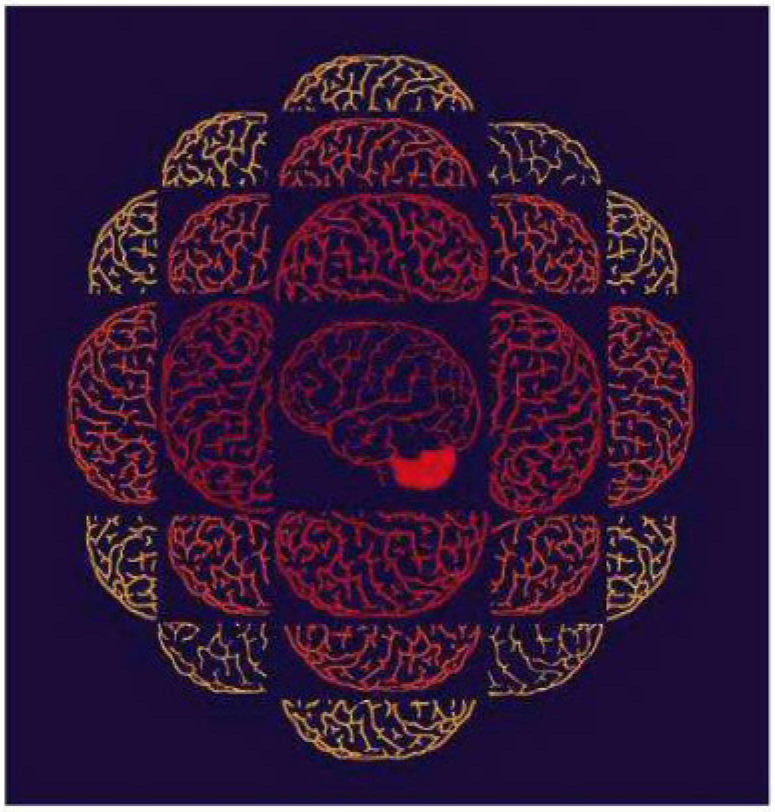


ANDY ROBERTS is a veteran fortean researcher and regular contributor to *FT*. His latest book is *Strangely Strange But Oddly Normal* (CFZ Press, 2010).

This year sees the UK's first major conference devoted to psychedelic drugs. *Breaking Convention: A Multi Disciplinary Conference on Psychedelic Consciousness* will be staged at the University of Kent's Virginia Woolf College over the weekend of 2–3 April. The gathering aims to bring together a broad spectrum of writers and researchers to discuss the current state of psychedelic research and the uses to which the growing list of consciousness-altering drugs can be put. The line-up of over 70 speakers includes Ralph Metzner and *FT* contributors Paul Devereux, Mike Jay, Graham Hancock and yours truly. But why such a gathering? And why now?

During the 1950s and 60s, LSD research was high on the agendas of MI6 and the MoD, who attempted to harness them for interrogation and as weapons of mass hallucination, a somewhat naïve approach to the complexities offered by psychedelic drugs and one that failed miserably. Considerably more successful was the UK psychotherapeutic community's use of LSD to treat conditions such as alcoholism and depression. But following pressure from the media and ill-advised public pronouncements by the self-styled 'High Priest' of LSD, Timothy Leary, the drug was outlawed in 1966, with manufacture, possession or distribution having serious legal consequences.

Predictably, this state of affairs gave birth to a psychedelic underground that has flourished ever since, germinating and nurturing a range of cultural phenomena such as the free festival scene, psychedelic music and many New Age therapies we now take for granted. LSD is arguably *the* fortean drug. Several key fortean writers, such as Robert Anton Wilson, John Michell and Graham Hancock, have cited LSD as being influential on their work, and the founders of Greenpeace, Alcoholics Anonymous, Microsoft and Apple have all noted the significance of the LSD experience in their lives. But media hyperbole and public disapprobation led to caution about making public claims for psychedelics as a catalyst for dramatic personal and social change. Such statements were left to commentators like comedian Bill Hicks, an aficionado of psychedelics who claimed he foresaw the illness that killed him while under the influence. Current laws notwithstanding, psychedelics are neither 'good' nor 'bad'. The nature of any psychedelic experience is determined by the complex interplay of dosage, set and setting; in that the potency of the drug combined with the psychonaut's personal beliefs, expectation about the drug and physical environment will form a crucial underpinning to the experience.



Now, a new generation of researchers, dismayed at how drugs with such potential have been almost legislated out of existence, has rediscovered the potential benefits of LSD and other psychedelics, and a psychedelic renaissance has begun. In the UK, the Beckley Foundation is at the leading edge of this research and has been granted permission to use LSD as part of a palliative treatment program to ease pain and pre-death anxiety in those suffering from terminal illnesses. The study, supported in America by MAPS (Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies), is being conducted in Switzerland. Patients who have participated in this study found the experience aided them emotionally and none experienced any negative reactions from the use of LSD. An early supporter of LSD being used in this manner was the writer and polymath Aldous Huxley, who in 1963 had LSD administered in the final hours of his terminal illness. The Beckley Foundation study is just one of a number of current psychedelic research initiatives; others can be found via the websites of the organisations mentioned.

This revival has also led to a slew of new books exploring psychedelia from different angles. Amanda Feilding's collection of essays and talks by Albert Hofmann is a sublime exposition of the thoughts of LSD's discoverer on many aspects of the drug (*Hofmann's Elixir*, Beckley Foundation, 2008). From the US perspective, Don Lattin unravels the motivations of the four horsemen of psychedelia – Tim Leary, Richard Alpert, Huston Smith and Andrew Weil – providing a perspective on how the American psychedelic scene developed (*The Harvard Psychedelic Club*, Harper One, 2010). Besides my own history of LSD in Britain (*Albion Dreaming*, Marshall Cavendish, 2008) there have been other more personal perspectives. In *The Mad Artist* (www.rogerkeen.com), Roger Keen offers a novelistic memoir illustrating the paradigm-changing effects of LSD on the mind of a young psychedelic seeker. Chris Gray's *The Acid Diaries* (Park Street Press, 2009) is the account of a psychedelic veteran's return to LSD long after his initial use, and *Operation Julie* (Y Lolfa, 2010) gives a detailed account of the Welsh end of the 1970s LSD manufacturing and distribution syndicate, written by a journalist who covered the case for local newspapers. If you have any interest in psychedelics, *Breaking Convention* and these books might be the ideal opportunity to bring yourself up to date with a subject we will be hearing much more of as the debate continues. FT

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Homeless bones

PAUL TAYLOR ponders the gruesome death and mysterious fate of Richard III, England's unburied king.

PAUL TAYLOR is a professional cartoonist and writer living in his native county of Leicestershire. His cartoons have appeared in most of the leading magazines in the UK.

Early in 2009, an empty stone coffin was donated to Bosworth Battlefield, scene of the death of King Richard III. Unearthed in a garden in nearby Earl Shilton, it was dated as possibly 15th-century and judged to be of a type made for a person of high rank. It now has pride of place in the courtyard of the prestigious Battlefield Visitors Centre. Not bad for a lidless, trough-like object used for years as a flowerbed in a villager's water-garden.

A mediæval coffin? The archæologists say so. Expensive in its day? The historians are confident. Richard III's sarcophagus? Silence… except for a spirited declaration from the Leicestershire County Council that the coffin is a "tremendous find and an excellent addition to the Battlefield Centre".[1]

No doubt it is. But nobody knows the origins of this so-called 'mystery coffin', and quite frankly it would be nothing short of a miracle if it has any real connection with Richard himself. Yet how typical it is that the vapours of the unknown have once again risen to nebulously envelop this most controversial and notorious of English monarchs.

You can take a coffin – any coffin – but where is the king? How can it be that nobody is certain of the final resting place of Richard III, last of the Plantagenet line? Richard suffered a terrible death at Bosworth on the morning of 22 August 1485. Betrayed by at least two duplicitous powerbrokers who should have made defeat by Henry Tudor impossible, namely Lord Stanley and the Earl of Northumberland, the king was surrounded and unhorsed as he fought like a man possessed in the middle of the frenzied melée. Once at the mercy of the rabble, he was repeatedly hacked and bludgeoned into the ground, even after all signs of life were gone. Tudor, protected at the rear of proceedings, never lifted a finger to prevent this gratuitous slaughter.

ABOVE: James Butler's 1980 statue of the last Plantagenet king, Richard III, in the Castle Gardens, Leicester.

BR LAWRENCE LEW, OP

Death was not enough for the victors. Richard was stripped naked and his broken body besmirched with filth. Unrecognisable as a king, and probably even as a human being, he was trussed across the back of a packhorse and led from the field of battle. A somewhat sickening finale to the last great showpiece of the mediæval era – but it didn't end there.

Tudor, now as Henry VII, took his entourage back into Leicester, back over Bow Bridge on the same road on which Richard had led out his army the previous morning. Richard's body was still naked, still filthy and still strapped to a horse. Humiliation, it seemed, was high on the new king's agenda. He ordered Richard's body to be put on public display so everyone would know he was dead.

Henry VII left for London to take up the throne. For two days, Richard's corpse was available for public viewing in Leicester, probably in the Church of Mary de Castro in the Newarke[2] or the nearby Hospital of the Holy Trinity. Other spots nearer the centre of the city have been suggested down the ages, but these two buildings (apart from being of Lancastrian foundation) were virtually in the grounds of Leicester Castle, and it would be surprising if the Castle hadn't been Henry's first stop on arrival. But this is where uncertainty begins to punch its weight against evidence, recorded or otherwise. Just as the Battle of Bosworth itself was inexplicably poorly documented, events from here on in are open to conjecture.

Tradition has it that the monks of the Greyfriars Monastery duly took charge of the corpse and interred it, with no great ceremony, in their chapel. There is some documentation showing that, in 1495, Henry VII stumped up some cash (not a lot) for a marble and alabaster monument to adorn the grave.[3] If this is so, it can be assumed that Richard lay at rest for at least a decade in the bosom of the monastery.

It had been a long time, if ever, since a king had received such poor treatment in death. The reason, ostensibly, for the new regime's vindictiveness was the revulsion they felt for Richard and the dubious methods he had used to carve out his path to the throne. The darkest and longest shadow cast on that path was the disappearance of his two nephews, forever to be known as the 'Princes In The Tower'. And yet, notwithstanding that fathomless pit of political intrigue, Richard had always carried strong and loyal support in large parts of the country, particularly the North and much of the Midlands. The removal of this strong-willed, battle-scarred hardcase was not as popular an act as history might have us believe.

Where are the Princes? Were the bones that were dug up under an old stairway in the Tower of London in the 17th century really theirs? It has never been proved either way.[4] Where is their uncle, the suspected architect of their demise? Are his bones still buried undisturbed somewhere beneath where the Greyfriars Monastery once stood? Homeless bones, bones lost forever?

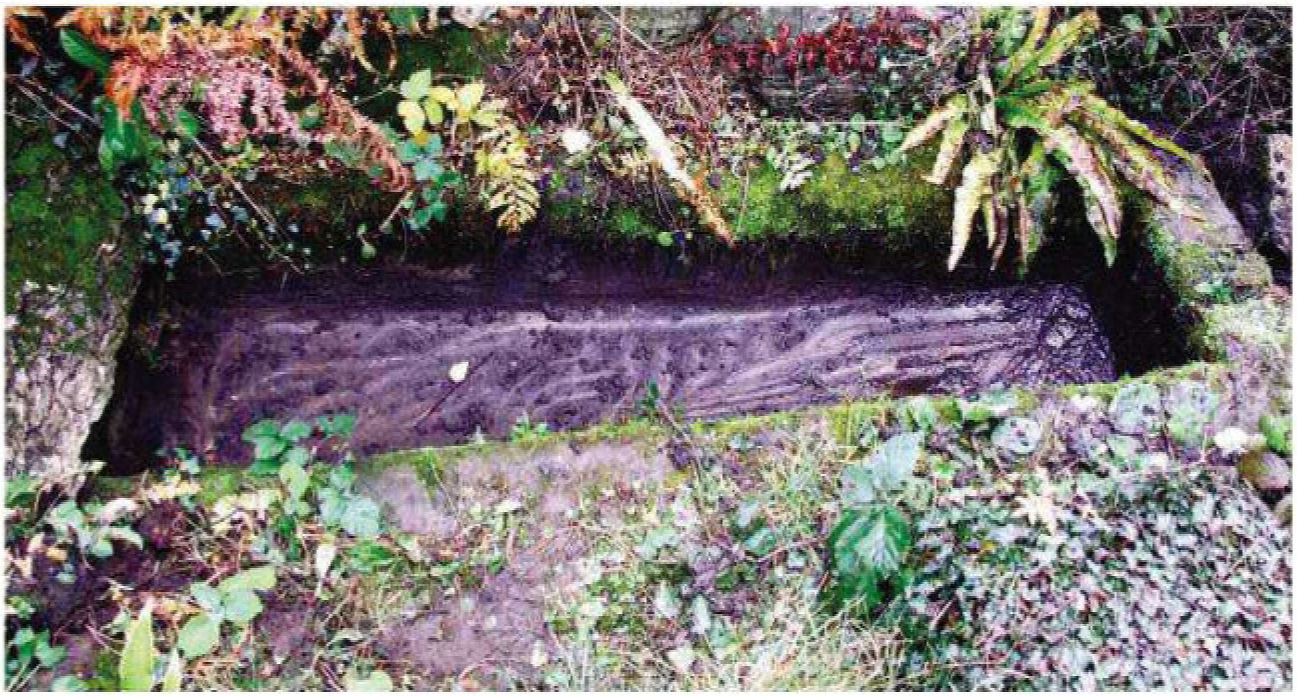
In 1536, Henry VIII, famous son of the victor of Bosworth Field, decided to smash and loot the country's monasteries in the name of his new religion. For three years, this 'Reformation' raged through a confused and frightened nation. The Greyfriars Monastery in Leicester, the likely burial site of Richard III, was despoiled in 1538, its roof taken off for the benefit of the Crown's coffers. A legend developed, weak in its hesitance, comic in its melodrama: Richard's bones had been dug up during the pillage and scattered by the mob into the River Soar. If you can grab a large pinch of salt, it might be best to take it now.

The 'mob', or ordinary law-abiding folk of Leicester, had no axe to grind with Richard. He had been no enemy of their proud and historic city. If a former king's remains had been cast into a local river as late as 1538, surely our archives would yet yield something more substantial than a rumour. A lot of things might have been torn up during Henry VIII's day, but a lot of things were written down, too. And the idea that Henry's own henchmen, regardless of any mob, might have ripped up the marble and alabaster monument that had been paid for by Henry's own father surely must take some swallowing.

In the Castle Gardens in Leicester, there stands a magnificent statue of Richard III. The commission was carried out by James Butler, RA, and was erected in 1980. Repeatedly vandalised in its early days, it was transferred from its initial site to a less exposed part of the Gardens. This turned out to be an inspired move, for the interference stopped immediately and never recommenced. Strange indeed, for its position is still totally accessible and the last 30 years has seen a nation splatter itself in mindless graffiti on a ridiculous scale. From this spot, Richard directly overlooks Bow Bridge and the very roadway on which he led out the royal forces westwards from the city to locate and engage the usurping Tudor.

This striking piece of work encapsulates so much of the drama and desperation associated with its subject. It depicts Richard on the verge of defeat, his clothes torn away from his unprotected arms as he stands with dagger gripped in one hand, battle-crown raised in the other. The face, a picture of searing anguish, searches the heavens in this final moment of defiance.

There is no hint of deformity in this sculpture. There is no evidence of Shakespeare's "bottled spider", no "ugly and unnatural aspect" to furnish it. Those who wish to see such time-honoured peculiarities will have to look elsewhere. Here is the portrayal of a man with strong, regular features; here is the warrior king, courageous to the last in his blighted defence of the realm. It could be argued that this is how Richard himself might have hoped to be remembered by the world at large. We know, these many years since his death, that such a hope has not been fulfilled.



ABOVE: The stone box claimed by some to be Richard III's coffin.

Here is the warrior king, courageous to the last

Shakespeare's play, *Richard III*, is the riveting masterpiece which brought the poet popular acclaim. Alas for Richard, it almost certainly cast its subject into eternal damnation. Posterity had been served up the epitomic arch-villain, and it wasn't going to let it go. The great actors of successive generations faithfully rallied to the Shakespearean cause, right through to the middle of the 20th century, when Laurence Olivier's stupefying interpretation, first on stage and then on film, gave the world the definitive article.

Very few, of course, would begrudge Shakespeare his right to artistic licence. But the power of his genius is such that in the case of his history plays, there must be a temptation for the audience to assume there is a sound basis of fact in the content. In the particular case of Richard III and his grotesque appearance, artistic licence could well have been taken to the limit. If only there remained a skeleton, laid out in a royal tomb as should have been the case, then we would know one way or the other about the veracity of these timeless claims of deformity.

But we are where we are. The fact remains that if any of Richard's bones are extant they are most likely beneath the ground on the site where once stood the Greyfriars Monastery in Leicester. Mediæval maps show that it was sited on land in what is now New Street, a narrow thoroughfare between St Martins and Friar Lane.[5] It is a short street, with a few buildings on one side and a municipal open-air car park on the other. A small stretch of a mediæval stone wall can be found at the rear of the car park; it is all that remains of the monastery.

Just yards away, incongruous in the extreme among the parked vehicles, stands a huge and forbidding tree. Its twisted, unnatural appearance is enough to raise the eyebrows of those who adhere to the Shakespearean concept of abnormality and who were hoping for a bizarre revelation, for this would be its marker.

It is a tree that could be at least 200 years old, with its roots surely spread beneath much of the length and breadth of the car park. If so, it is unlikely that anything but the minimum amount of excavation or surface clearance has been used to penetrate the site in anything like recent times… if ever.

It would be somewhere here, somewhere among and adjacent to things old and new, the orderly and the out-of-place, that a mystery may one day be solved, or deepened, or just left to rest in peace. FT

NOTES

1 http://bit.ly/dJls3A (leics.gov.uk)

2 http://bit.ly/fsMFhc (culture24.org.uk). .

3 Early Chancery Records, C1/206/69. Plea dated 1 July, 1496.

4 "The Trial of Richard III" (London Weekend Television, 1984).

5 http://bit.ly/gzf5qL (leicester.gov.uk).

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This month's books, films and games

reviews

Remembering a fading tradition

A handsome edition follows a dear friend of *Fortean Times* from country pile to Notting Hill via a Fitzrovia bath house, and from the hippyocracy to 'Nosher' Neal

Michellany

A John Michell Reader

Ed: Jonangus Mackay

Michellany Editions 2010

Hb, 128pp, illus, £38+p&p, ISBN 9780956642806

AVAILABLE FROM MICHELLANY@JOHNMICHELL.COM

It is nearly two years since John Michell – drolly described as "a charismatic Old Etonian mystic" in the *Telegraph* obituary – died on 24 April, peacefully and surrounded by his loving family. I still can barely comprehend a world without him. There can be no doubt about the degree of affection in which he was held.

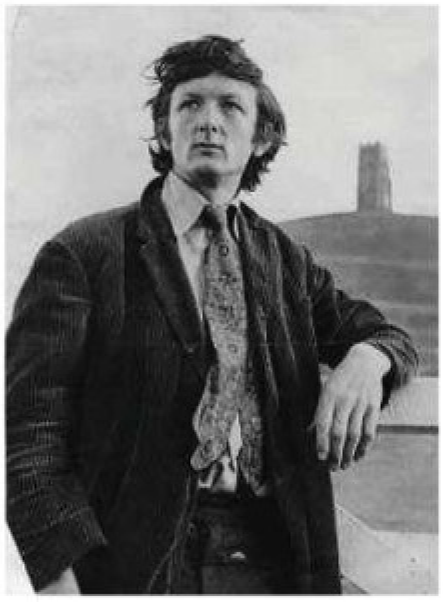
If the complexities of his numerological associations, maths and antique philosophy went over your head, his geometries – often expressed in delightfully-coloured hand-made illustrations – caught your eye as plain and pleasing emblems of deeper mysteries. When John drew, spoke or wrote, it was clear that he, at least, understood things and was passionate in his pursuit of them.

He was affectionate without being sentimental, eccentric without being distant, compassionate without being partisan, and kindly without any trace of arrogance. He was also the epitome of what it means to uphold Fort's admonition to "substitute acceptance for belief". All this and more shines out of this memorial anthology published by Richard Adams and John's rediscovered son Jason Goodwin.

Graphic designer Richard Adams – one of the great unsung heroes of the *FT* saga, especially before we had a commercial publisher – had a productive partnership with John for more than 30 years, designing and publishing some of John's early broadsides (eg, on gay blasphemy, anti-metrication, Michael X, *The Fanatic* with Heathcote Williams, Old Mother Shipton, Hitler's wit, and other publications on leys, UFOs, Glastonbury and crop circles).

Friends of the pair would, every Christmas, receive a short story by one of John's favourite writers along with a commentary by John, beautifully designed as a small booklet by Richard. *Michellany* was overseen by Richard, compiled and edited by Jonangus Mackay; and designed by Richard's graphic designer son Sam.

Hard-bound, with subtle printings of John's maps of Cornish megalith alignments on the cover boards, this eclectic volume is full of moody monochrome photographs. Some are from his childhood, with his brother Charles and sister Clare, and their ancestral home, a Hampshire pile called Stargrove (later owned by Mick Jagger); others show him in his 30s, a young man in London when he attracted admiration from rock stars and writers, was swindled out of his inheritance, and lived to excess, sleeping it off in the Fitzrovia bathhouse; others document expeditions to ancient stones, or show him at work in his book-lined rooms, or upholding the foot in the USA.



> "armed hippies fought a slum landlord's gang of enforcers over cannabis dealing"

One in particular has extraordinary historic importance: a group photo spanning two pages showing "the hippyocracy at school" on May Day, 1969. Many of those attending Sir George Trevelyan's private college at Attingham Park that day went on to be instrumental in the UK's Underground and New Age movements. Coincidentally, John was buried on May Day, the ancient Beltane, at Stoke Abbott, and the penultimate image is a poignant snapshot of his funeral procession on a gypsy cart, accompanied by his grandchildren, heading to the churchyard.

Included here are 22 short pieces by John (including an account of his first visit to Glastonbury in 1966), some never before published, all brimming with his wit, his erudition, clarity and love of fading tradition. Peppered amongst these are personal memoirs of close friends and family, including John's brother Charles, his cousin Joanna Saunders and colleagues Candida Lycett-Green, Christine Rhone, Rollo Maughling, John Fletcher, Patrick Harpur, Anne Leslie, Rupert Sheldrake, Christopher Gibbs, Joe Boyd.

Here, too, are the various pieces I wrote for **FT249** and **FT250**, massaged together.

Some are moving, like Jason Goodwin's account of how, at the age of 28, he rediscovered John, his father. John confessed to him that he regretted his failure to settle, "but then revealed, characteristically, the silver lining: that the unattached life freed him to be wholly absorbed in his quests". Some reveal surprising aspects of the world in which John moved; eg 'Nosher' Neal's account of the late 60s in Notting Hill, when armed hippies fought a slum landlord's gang of enforcers over cannabis dealing. Others are quite delightful, like Merrily Harpur's identification of the 'Mrs E Bland-Tucker' in one of John's poems.

Apart from roughly following the progress of John's life, *Michellany* has no obvious structure, but that is quite appropriate to the way John lived and worked – every available surface of his flat in apparent chaos, littered with papers, drawings, photographs, books open at significant passages and greater heaps waiting to be read… yet John knew where everything was. He was the master of continuity and context. This is a joyous and often hilarious treasure trove of memories, celebrating our luck in knowing a true harmonising spirit.

Only 450 copies were privately printed to superior specifications. It's not available in bookshops, so phone 020-7221 7680, or email michellany@johnmichell.com to reserve your own signed and numbered copy of this valuable testament to a singular man.

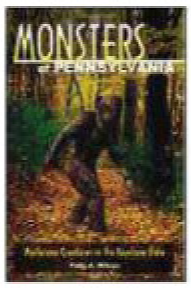
Bob Rickard

Fortean Times Verdict

JOYFUL AND OFTEN HILARIOUS TALES OF A FORTEAN GENTLEMAN **10**

Keystone cats

A drastically dislocated cougar shakes confidence in a guide to PA's cryptids



Monsters of Pennsylvania

Mysterious Creatures in the Keystone State

Patty A Wilson

Stackpole Books 2010

Pb, 135pp, bib, £10.99, ISBN 9780811736251

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £9.89

Monsters of Pennsylvania is another of Stackpole's state-by-state surveys of American monsters. Patty Wilson's works include *UFOs in Pennsylvania, Haunted Pennsylvania* and *Boos and Brews*, a guide to haunted Pennsylvania taverns.

Wilson informs us that her state is "home to an assortment of odd creatures" then offers "the best of the bunch", with Bigfoot commanding over half of the following text. She focuses on 26 alleged encounters with apelike cryptids chosen from 500-plus reported since the early 19th century.

Her two Bigfoot chapters – and, indeed, the other five – present cases in random chronological order, presumably on the basis of their drama and interest. Readers begin in 1835, skip ahead to 2004, fall back to 1978, fast-forward to 1993 and so on. This does not detract from Wilson's story-telling, but those seeking to use *Monsters of Pennsylvania* as a reference tool may struggle. Fans of pulp authors Warren Smith, Brad Steiger and the like will feel at home.

Wilson skimps on details in some cases where they would be helpful for corroboration and extended research. An outbreak of 'gorilla' sightings dates from "the early part of the last decade"; another incident occurs "one summer in the late 1970s"; and yet another happens "on a cold night in February" of some unknown year. Readers who scour the bibliography for more details are further handicapped by use of pseudonyms for witnesses in some of the most interesting cases.

Subsequent chapters review supposed sightings of non-Sasquatchian humanoid creatures, mystery cats, giant snakes, the Jersey Devil (straying from its native turf), "thunderbirds" and werewolves, which belong more properly to myth: only one of five cases identifies its witness (a teenage soldier in the American Revolution) by name and, like the other werewolf tales, it provides no dates or other verifiable details.

No published book is devoid of errors. Some are printers' foibles; others reflect a glitch in fact-checking. One example, sadly, calls Wilson's research into question. Her chapter on big cats includes the case of a cougar killed "in the Palo Alto area of Schuylkill County" on 17 May 2004. The source is an article from the *Stanford Daily* headlined 'Mountain Lion Killed in PA'. The *Daily* is a newspaper published at Stanford University, and the article cited reports a cougar's death in Palo Alto, California. 'PA' is an abbreviation for Palo Alto, not Pennsylvania. It is difficult to understand how any reader of the *Daily*'s article – or other pieces in papers including the *San Francisco Chronicle* – could have transferred the incident across the country.

That glaring error caused me to question Wilson's reports of other events, where names have been altered, with dates and locations obscured. Casual readers will enjoy Wilson's narrative, but *Monsters of Pennsylvania* falls short in terms of scholarship.

Michael Newton

Fortean Times Verdict

AN ENGAGING SURVEY, IF RATHER SHORT ON VERIFIABLE DETAILS 7

Weird Astronomy

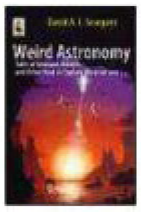
Tales of Unusual, Bizarre and Other Hard to Explain Observations

David AJ Seargent

Springer 2011

Pb, 304pp, illus, appxs, ind, £35.99/$39.95, ISBN 9781441964236

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £35.99



Weird Astronomy is a *wunderkabinett* of astronomical anomalies, a compendium of cosmological conundrums, a scientific *smörgåsbord* showing that the Universe remains stranger than we can possibly imagine. It's one of the most evocative, incisive and fascinating books I've read on astronomy. And it's packed with classic fortean damned data – such as foul-smelling glutinous meteorites, coloured rain and microbes that may inhabit the upper Venusian atmosphere.

Seargent's clear, intelligent and insightful prose considers and summarises all sides of any debate. For instance, in 1976, the Viking Martian probes used an experiment called Labelled Release, which aimed to detect microbiological life. The probes detected an 'active agent' in the Red Planet's soil – but whether this is life or a chemical remains a moot point. Some biologists believe that the Labelled Release results – taken together with recent findings of methane plumes and several other strands of mutually reinforcing evidence – suggest there is life (probably microbiological) on Mars. Seargent points out that "most authorities remain unconvinced" that Viking found life, but notes that "the jury is still out".

As this example illustrates, Seargent shows where the scientific consensus lies. Yet he doesn't dismiss minority views, provided they're scientifically plausible. Essentially, he supplies you with the information, then allows you to decide. The mind, he writes, "is like a parachute; it only works properly when it is open". *Weird Astronomy* is so compelling partly because this principle pervades every page.

Xenobiology aside, there's plenty to interest forteans. Seargent considers, among many others, transient lunar phenomena, protuberances and bridges on the Moon, as well as the planet Vulcan, which some astronomers believed once orbited between Mercury and the Sun.

And in a brilliant chapter, Seargent summarises the history of the Martian features that mainstream astronomy regards as simulacra – from Lowell's canals to geometrical shapes seen in the late 19th and early 20th century that convinced some that Martians were attempting communication, and on to the Cydonia face and 'Inca city'.

Seargent also offers UFO researchers a feast for thought. For instance, he explores the 'classic' misidentification of Venus as well as many less well-known misinterpretations, such the enigmatic nebulous fireballs that can appear cigar-shaped. Indeed, Seargent suggests that astronomers might find "very interesting phenomena [..] lurking in lists of [UFO] observations seldom scrutinised by meteor experts".

Weird Astronomy may seem pricey, but I suspect most forteans will read it several times. The book is a masterclass in popular science writing, marred only by the lack of references.

Mark Greener

Fortean Times Verdict

A STELLAR BOOK, AND A MUST-READ FOR SKY-GAZING FORTEANS 10

Houdini

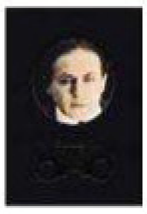
Art and Magic

Ed: Brooke Kamin Rapaport

The Jewish Museum & Yale University Press 2010

Hb, 261pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £25.00, ISBN 9780300146844

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £22.50



Another book about Harry Houdini. This one accompanies an exhibition organised by The Jewish Museum in New York, which makes it rather different from the rest, as it covers areas relatively untouched by earlier biographies – Houdini's Jewish background, his cultural significance as he transformed himself from impoverished immigrant to international superstar, and how he has been co-opted by artists since his death.

Brooke Kamin Rapaport outlines Houdini's significance in popular American culture, surveying depictions of him during his lifetime in poster art and the control he exerted over his image (he manipulated the media as adroitly as he did handcuffs). She considers how his graphic legacy has been used by the fine arts in recent decades, which allows her to bring in a range of creative practitioners with a debt to Houdini who would not normally appear in a book about him.

Alan Brinkley writes about how Houdini's life related to those of other 19th-century immigrants as waves arrived in the United States, particularly from Europe. Kenneth Silverman discusses the implications of Houdini being a rabbi's son and Hasia R Diner contributes an essay foregrounding Bess Houdini, who has generally been overshadowed in biographies of her husband.

In addition to the sections on the Houdinis, there are interviews, mostly snippets, with individuals who have been influenced by him including EL Doctorow, Teller (of Penn and Teller), and Matthew Barney. A chronology runs from Houdini's birth in 1874 to Bess's death in 1943, and a section shows the types of apparatus Harry used. A filmography and bibliography conclude the volume.

The writing is fascinating, but the book's real strength lies in its pictures. It is beautifully illustrated throughout with photographs of Harry and Bess, posters and ephemera, film stills, and modern photographs of equipment, all reproduced on good quality paper. In addition to those directly relating to Houdini's life and career, the entire volume is liberally sprinkled with examples of art which reflect the creators' interpretations of Houdiniist iconography. What these indicate is that the idea of Houdini, what he stands for in the popular imagination, is capable of endless renewal. Any Houdini enthusiast will want to own this book.

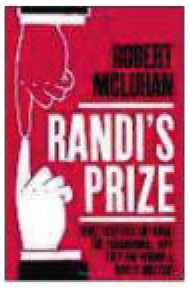
Tom Ruffles

Fortean Times Verdict

A FINE, AND FINELY ILLUSTRATED, NEW LOOK AT AN OLD MASTER **9**

Really into heavy meta

The evidence for both sides in the paranormal believer versus sceptic ding-dong is – accidentally – exposed as inadequate



Randi's Prize

What Sceptics Say About the Paranormal, Why They Are Wrong and Why It Matters

Robert McLuhan

Matador 2010

Pb, 418pp, £8.99, ind, bib, notes, refs, ISBN 9781848764941

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £8.54

Randi's Prize is a moderate believer's critique of sceptics' responses to evidence presented by believers to support their claims about the paranormal. It's all a bit meta. If you're a fortean, there's no need to get involved in this backwards and forwards slog: neither the evidence for the paranormal nor the sceptical critique of it completely stack up. *Randi's Prize* inadvertently provides evidence for the inadequacy of both positions.

Believers' evidence is elusive, open to question, unreproduceable and tainted by incidents of fakery and fraud, but impossible to dismiss completely. The sceptical critique tends to be partial, superficial and patronising; it focuses on limited aspects of what is reported, misunderstands Occam's Razor, repeatedly demonstrates that some phenomena *can* be faked (without showing that they *have* been), and aims for normalisation rather than understanding. However, it does highlight legitimate inadequacies in the believers' claims.

Neither side is particularly scientific. Believers can't produce enough evidence to convince sceptics, who can't provide a refutation effective enough to dissipate belief, and this arid pattern repeats to no one's satisfaction.

I don't think McLuhan's intention is to highlight this stalemate. He's trying to bolster the credibility of the claims he examines by exposing the failings in sceptical critiques. He achieves the latter, if not the former.

The discussion is more fruitful when there are modern phenomena rather than historical cases to consider. This is particularly evident in the chapters on poltergeists and mediums. McLuhan points out that the poltergeist phenomenon has been broadly consistent across time, and it is unlikely that everyone is copying each other. Sceptics focus on a limited number of cases, and not always the most credible ones. They extrapolate from occasional incidents of faking, suggest techniques that are beyond the likely knowledge and ability of those they are accusing, and they don't do their fieldwork. (You can derive from this reasonable suggestions for investigations that might produce a better understanding of the phenomenon in question.) On the other hand, arguments over contemporary claims and counterclaims about early 20th-century trance medium phenomena will never be resolved. None of the protagonists is around and virtually no one is producing equivalent phenomena for investigation.

Some modern phenomena prove difficult to treat in an interesting way. The dissection of Rupert Sheldrake and Richard Wiseman's methodologies for investigating whether dogs can tell when their owner is heading home is dull. McLuhan's conclusion – that different approaches might have produced the differing results – could have been said in a fraction of the time.

McLuhan does not deliver the critique of scepticism he perhaps hoped for. He is too concerned with the sceptic/believer to-and-fro. Organised scepticism works extremely well with objectively verifiable claims, such as those of alternative medicine. It's less successful when dealing with the evanescent sprites of the paranormal.

The inability to agree what is being investigated and the impossibility of identifying variables – let alone controlling them – preclude any sensible analysis. In some cases, such as spontaneous human combustion (not covered here), it has largely proved possible to resolve what's behind a phenomenon. However, as many phenomena seem to involve special states of consciousness (and we are nowhere near understanding *ordinary* consciousness!), we may have a long way to go before we can make sense of them.

There is room for a critical look at the culture of scepticism, as Alom Shaha's entertaining recent pieces on the *Guardian* "Comment is Free" site have indicated, but this book is not it. McLuhan would have needed to steer away from the old claim/counterclaim tennis match and consider other aspects of the story.

He succumbed to the temptation, and so produced a moderately interesting book rather than a groundbreaking one.

Ian Simmons

Fortean Times Verdict

INTERESTING, BUT STUCK IN THE BELIEVER/SCEPTIC TENNIS MATCH **7**

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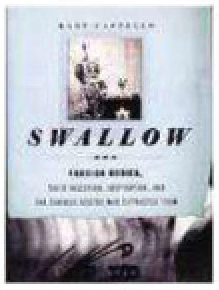
An instrument man

“A button box is a dangerous plaything”, warned foreign body collector/cataloguer and laryngologist ‘Chevrolet’ Jackson



Swallow

Foreign Bodies, Their Ingestion, Inspiration, and the Curious Doctor Who Extracted Them

Mary Cappello

The New Press 2011
Hb, 292pp, illus, bib, ind, $27.95/£19.99, ISBN 9781595583956
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £17.99

This book is worth sinking your teeth into (and I promise that’s the only pun I’ll use). The “curious doctor” of the subtitle is Pennsylvania laryngologist Chevalier Jackson (1865–1958). *Swallow* focuses on the vast collection of objects that he removed from throats and lungs, but the book is more than a compilation of case studies. It is not through the specimens that we learn about the peculiar man who extracted them, but through his obsessive-compulsive inventory and curation of the items, many of which he denied children and parents the bragging rights of taking home. The lasting result of Jackson’s tenacity is housed in numbered drawers in Philadelphia’s Mütter Museum.

These foreign bodies (“fbodies,” as he abbreviates in his notes) include coins, hairpins, jacks, tacks, toys, peanuts and a ‘perfect attendance’ pin. Many are safety – or as Jackson preferred to call them, danger – pins, and he frequently blamed the parents for carelessly leaving the child in reach of swallowable objects. But in his most difficult case, he found that the four large open safety pins lodged in the œsophagus of a nine-month-old had been fed to the baby by the older sister. The pins in the collection and in its records provide metaphors for the doctor’s staff and for the author. A chain of safety pins representative of the sizes that might be ingorged or inhaled was referred to in Jackson’s office as the “bronchoscopic rosary.” Seeing and reading about them, Cappello refers to the doctor’s “alphabet of pins, pins turned into cuneiform, piercing, punctuating, staying the page.”

The award-winning author, who is not a poet but does teach creative writing, is very conscious of the words she uses (describing another circular display of stomach contents as a “pulsating mandala”) and those Jackson uses (“hysteria” rather than the eating disorder “pica”). And the story of his life resurrects memories of hers. The title *Swallow* is the command she heard repeated when her stomach was pumped at the age of four, and later in the book she confesses to having forced a schoolmate to dirt.

Jackson’s words were many: he wrote 238 articles, co-wrote 473, and authored 12 textbooks and six monographs including an autobiography in which he often spoke of himself in the third person. He seemed concerned with how he would be remembered, and left a letter in the hands of his secretary to be disseminated in the event of his death, along with his *curriculum vitæ* and reference to his aforementioned memoir. He might have been more dismayed than amused that a man operated on as a child in 1935 remembered him as ‘Chevrolet Jackson’.

Chevalier Jackson’s contemporaries believed he would be remembered for his bronchoscopes: forward-grasping, alligator, rotation, square-built, side-curved, long-jawed, spooned, and beak-like, as Cappello catalogues, noting that “Jackson was an instruments man, no question.” She reveals that the endoscope and bronchoscope were inspired by – and tested on – sword swallowers. She remarks on the irony of having unintentionally swallowed hardware and then being forced to swallow a metal scope to have it removed. And she compares the speculum to the bronchoscope, and makes mention of the recovery of foreign bodies from other orifices as documented in the medical literature.

Happily for the *Fortean Times* reader, Cappello delves into the popular as well as the professional media. References to weird news include the Chinese giant reaching down the throat of a dolphin to retrieve the plastic it had ingested, the Massachusetts man with a plant growing in his lung, and patients suffering from “night eating syndrome”. She has tapped the *Roadside America* website for other museums with foreign body displays, comments on the commercial availability of vomit-flavoured Harry Potter jelly beans, and even discusses the nursery rhyme ‘There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly’.

Dr Jackson was bullied as a child; as an adult he “tortured without anæsthetic”, but did so compassionately and usually in under a minute. His method avoided the often fatal alternative of surgical intervention. He would be appalled, writes the author, by contemporary statistics in which the average endoscopic procedure takes 46 minutes and is performed under anæsthesia. Jackson was as preoccupied by the physical properties of the easily mis-swallowed peanut as today’s parents are about its allergic potential. Jackson warned: “A button box is a dangerous plaything.” Oh, and he also painted portraits that are now owned by the Smithsonian Institution.

Christine Quigley

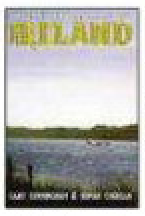
Fortean Times Verdict

PICA BOO! LOOK WHAT THOSE KIDS HAVE BEEN SWALLOWING! **9**

The Mystery Animals of Ireland

Gary Cunningham & Ronan Coghlan

CFZ Press 2010
Pb, 188pp, £9.99, ISBN 9781905723591
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £9.99



While the Irish cryptozoology field was in need of an update, I’m not so certain this book is entirely up to the task. Nearly half of it is given over to lake monsters and sea serpents. Clearly, this is where the main expertise of the authors lies, and they gather a large body of sightings – but what of other phenomena? There have been quite a few big cat sightings in Ireland, but the relevant chapter deals with the whole subject in three and-a-half pages.

The quality of the evidence that Cunningham and Coghlan muster is often vague and to my mind inadequate. For instance, when a statement like this appears as evidence – “In 1910 a sea-serpent with a brown hairy body and a six foot-long neck was seen off the coast of Co. Galway” – I find myself getting sceptical. The level of interpretation, too, leaves much to be desired. Most of the chapters end with an attempt at an analytical conclusion; but these are often short, sheepish and shallow. The arrangement of the book is haphazard; there is no obvious logic to the order of chapters, and the paucity of material in some of them leaves the reader wondering why they were included. Where *The Mystery Animals of Ireland* really falls down, though, is the quality of the text-editing. There are many misspellings of Irish place names throughout, and the book is full of terrible typos: sentences are suddenly interrupted in full flow by a full stop; brackets open, but don’t close, or close and don’t open; literals litter the book.

While a decent body of research underpins this book – particularly the lake monster material – its production gives every indication of being hurried, which has not helped the authors’ cause at all.

Noel Rooney

Fortean Times Verdict

SOME DECENT RESEARCH LET DOWN BY ERRORS AND TYPOS **5**

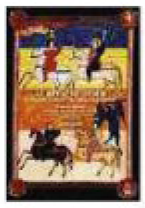
The Forgotten Kingdom

The Tragedy of the Cathars – The Albigensian Crusade

Jordi Savall, Hesperion XXI

Alia Vox 2009

Hb, 560pp, illus, bib, notes, 3 SACDs, £34.99, AVSA9873



If Richard Stanley's pursuit of the elusive Otto Rahn (pp30–36) has piqued your interest in the Cathars, then I'd recommend Jordi Savall's recent musico-historical epic *The Forgotten Kingdom*, a gorgeous tapestry of words and music exploring the golden age of Occitan culture and its destruction at the hands of Pope Innocent III's Albigensian Crusade. A distant tragedy – but, as Savall points out, not one without recent analogues; the 'crusade' against an 'enemy within' has been the engine for persecution for the past century.

For Savall, the lost 'Land of Oc' is a crossroads of cultures and diverse spiritual traditions, not the hotbed of heresy denounced by the Church. The 'bons hommes et bonnes femmes' rubbed shoulders with troubadours, Cabbalists and Muslim love poets. The result, here, is a musical melting pot, with three and a half hours of troubador songs, plainchant, haunting instrumentals, Cathar liturgy and recited texts (such as Innocent's Bull proclaiming the Crusade). The soundworld Savall creates is an equally rich mix, employing voices, lutes, viols, trumpets, and bells as well as more exotic sounds of ney, duduk and kaval. Context is provided by a series of essays on everything from the Inquisition to the link between Catharism and the Troubador tradition (explored by Rahn himself).

The lovely, chunky tome in which the CDs sit provides full texts (in English and five other languages, including Occitan), chronologies, notes and a wealth of beautiful illustrative material. While there are better places to find a clear account of the 'Tragedy of the Cathars', this is the only one that allows you to close your eyes and be transported back to Occitania.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict

A FASCINATING FEAST OF SOUND, WORD AND IMAGE 9

Homage to Pan

The Life, Art and Sex-Magic of Rosaleen Norton

Nevill Drury

Creation Oneiros 2009

Pb, 255pp, illus, bib, notes, ind, $24.95/£16.95, ISBN 9781902197265

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £15.26

Rosaleen Norton (1917–1979) was an Australian visionary artist and occultist who caused something of a scandal in Sydney during the 1950s as a 'witch' whose art was often deemed obscene (see **FT224:48–54**). Fortunately, times have changed, and Nevill Drury has done much to rehabilitate her reputation.

This is a reworked and expanded version of Drury's earlier biography, *Pan's Daughter* (1988), and the emphasis has changed: there's rather less actual biography than the original, and much more exploration of her occultism and, particularly, her interest in sex-magic. This is particularly valuable material, although, unfortunately, the preceding chapters on the history of western occultism, and Aleister Crowley, look rather more like padding than 'necessary background'. There's also the complete surviving text of an interview Norton gave to a psychologist at the University of Melbourne in 1949.

This new edition also contains far more examples of Norton's artwork than the original book, which in her best period was very good indeed and often focused on the deities of her personal occult pantheon. Regrettably, these are only printed in black-and-white, and often far too small to make a real impact.

The production and proofreading are sloppy too; one would at least expect the contents page to be correctly numbered.

While much has been added to the original, a certain amount has also been omitted. Readers interested in Norton may wish to get both books.

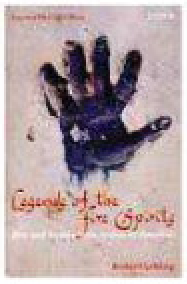
Steve Moore

Fortean Times Verdict

A FASCINATING INSIGHT BUT NOT QUITE THE BOOK SHE DESERVES 8

Jinn and tonic

A superb study of the sons of smokeless fire rescues the jinn from the panto



Legends of the Fire Spirits

Jinn and Genies from Arabia to Zanzibar

Robert Lebling

IB Taurus 2010

Hb, 298pp, notes, refs, ind, £20.00, ISBN 9781845119935

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £18.00

In the West, jinn and genies are associated with cartoons, pantomimes, fairy tales and fantasy games; Lebling shows us just how limited that view is.

Tales of jinn are as prevalent throughout Muslim culture today as when they were described to the Prophet Muhammad by the angel Gabriel. Muslims accept the teachings of the Qur'an that jinn are real, intelligent beings that are not human, yet are male and female, have families and free will. Some follow Islam; others reject it and are called ghouls or demons. God created a plurality of worlds; the jinn's is invisible to us, normally, but they can interact with humans. They are shape-changers with seemingly magical powers. Some have great knowledge: one story tells of Ishmonia, a desert ruin, where at night the lamps of the jinn can be seen flitting to and fro as they study ancient scrolls.

Lebling draws from Islamic historical literature different aspects of jinn and legends of their origins. An important chapter deals with pre-Islamic belief in jinn, and jinn-like entities in other cultures. There is a swath of pre-Islamic material about King Solomon and other human 'magicians' who gained power over jinn. Here, too, are jinn in Islamic Spain, in ruins and wells, causing hauntings and illness, as shape-shifters, as muses or tormentors, or as a source of evil needing exorcism. Chapter four is a treasure trove of jinn folk traditions of Islamic cultures. Chapter six analyses the legacy of jinn lore in the art and literature of other cultures.

Jinn watch and occasionally abduct or mate with humans. Here, Lebling acknowledges this affinity with the behaviour of aliens and 'Greys' in Western ufology. (Appendix C summarises attempts to reconcile jinn lore with ufological theories and physics). He delves deep into the possession of humans by jinn (gifted poets were called *majnun*, possessed by jinn, but the word generally means 'crazy') and, as Muhammad Asad wrote, "very rare" interactions between jinn and humans "may well give rise to strange manifestations" which, because inexplicable, are "interpreted as ghosts, demons [and] 'supernatural apparitions'." The phenomenology of these 'interactions' is, of course, most interesting for forteans.

Lebling protests that he wrote the book for "the curious and the open-minded". His scholarly apparatus is direct and unobtrusive; he formed a dedicated discussion group on Yahoo; and translated many of the rare Arabic texts. His position is balanced and respectful (both to Islam and his sources). Tahir Shah calls this book "an extraordinary masterwork". Even those familiar with Islamic literature will delight in Lebling's pursuit of the "sons of smokeless fire". *Legends of the Fire Spirits* deserves to be read by anyone interested in forteana, anthropology, folklore and theology.

Otto Minyak

Fortean Times Verdict

A GLORIOUS FEAST OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL FORTEANA 9

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The Insatiable Moon

Dir Rosemary Riddell, New Zealand, 2010

On limited UK release from 4 March

This quirky low-budget film from New Zealand tells the story of Arthur (Rawiri Paratene), a mentally ill Maori living in the Auckland suburb of Ponsonby who comes to believe he is, in fact, "Arthur, Second Son of God", a modern Messiah on a mission to save the world (he's vague on details) and to find the Queen of the Moon (whoever she may be).

Arthur spends most of his time with his fellow drop-outs, alkies and nutters in a run-down boarding house presided over by foul-mouthed proprietor Bob (Greg Johnson), who despite appearances, looks after his charges with genuine love and care. While this eccentric extended 'family' has been fending for itself ever since the local asylums closed and 'care in the community' took over, creeping gentrification and rocketing land prices mean that greedy property developers are eying up the hostel while the heartless health authority wants it closed down.

Before he can save the world, it seems, Arthur will have to save the boarding house. Meanwhile, he finds his Queen of the Moon in the form of Margaret (Sara Wiseman), a middle-class white woman whose marriage is going through a crisis and who is desperate for a baby.

Inspired by real characters, made for peanuts and against the odds by the husband and wife writer-director team Mike and Rosemarry Riddell (the NZ Film Commission gets zero cred for having turned it down), *The Insatiable Moon* is clearly a labour of love. It's a quality that comes over on screen – particularly in the film's really enjoyable ensemble performances and strong sense of place – and makes up for its shortcomings (the soundtrack, for example, veers towards the mawkish).

The movie encompasses a wide emotional range, taking in Ealing-esque comedy, social comment and spiritual speculation, and is funny, heart-warming and tear-jerking by turns. Like Margaret, and initially sceptical local vicar Kevin (Jason Hoyte), we end up half-convinced by Arthur's self-proclaimed divinity, largely due to Paratene's remarkable, impassioned performance. After all, he seems to know things he shouldn't and has a SLIder-like affect on lights and traffic crossings... but, ultimately, the real or delusional status of Arthur's mission is not the issue; his beliefs and actions make a real difference to the people around him, and thus to the wider community. Some have dubbed the film "One Flew Over the Kiwi's Nest"; probably too heart-on-sleeve for the 'foreign movie' arthouse crowd and too left-field for the mainstream, this gentle, compassionate film has some genuinely worthwhile things to say about community, religion, mental health and the sort of world we want to live in. Recommended.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict

A QUIRKY AND COMPASSIONATE LABOUR OF LOVE FROM NZ **8**

Ironclad

Dir Jonathan English, US/UK 2010

On UK release from 4 March

Directed by the aptly named Jonathan English, *Ironclad* is a self-consciously gritty siege picture set in the 13th century and starring a host of jobbing character actors doing their best to entertain throughout the film's overlong running time. The plot focuses on the latter days of nefarious King John, played here by a suitably snarling Paul Giamatti. Politically castrated after being forced to sign Magna Carta, John launches a campaign to regain control of his country and exact vengeance on those barons who had rebelled against him. Thus it falls to James Purefoy's sullen Templar Knight and Brian Cox's pugnacious nobleman to assemble a ragtag band of cutthroats to defend the strategically vital Rochester Castle from John and his army of mercenaries.

It's a decent, if unoriginal, premise – indeed, it's a decent, if unoriginal film. In fact, *Ironclad* feels very much like a watered-down version of Ridley Scott's *Robin Hood*, which also strove (arguably in vain) to marry a mediæval story with gritty brutality. This uncanny sense of *déjà vu* even extends to the cast – not only Purefoy but also half the supporting mob have gone through these motions before, sometimes in each others' films.

However, *Ironclad* does do a lot right. For one thing, its technical depiction of the Rochester siege is excellent, seamlessly intertwining physical effects with CGI to produce an engagingly visceral experience. Likewise, the cast is generally rather good, though Purefoy's sulky do-gooder is a boring lead (his titter-inducingly awkward romance with Kate Mara's sexually frustrated spouse notwithstanding, raising as it did more laughs in a minute than Jamie Foreman's baffling comic relief does in 120). Crook and Flemyng, meanwhile, entertain despite woefully underdeveloped characterisation. The real standouts, however, are Giamatti, Cox and an underused Charles Dance (as a sympathetic archbishop). Giamatti, in particular, completely steals the show with his glowering, embittered portrayal of dishevelled royalty. Mixing affable wit with a cold-blooded villainy, he combines pantomime with pathos to forge an antagonist worthy of a better film.

But it is the brutality which all too often fails to gel with the rest of what's on screen; Giamatti reflecting on the divine right of kings is juxtaposed with Purefoy cutting a man in half and being showered in his entrails; extended torture sequences feel like peasant-enacted torture porn. Violence is fine; however, the film refuses to choose between using it for realism or shlocky entertainment.

Ironclad is a commendable low-budget effort, aided by some great turns and superb visuals, even when unsure of its own voice.

James McMeekin

Fortean Times Verdict

UNEVEN, BUT DELIVERS SOME GREAT PERFORMANCES **7**

F

Dir Johannes Roberts, UK 2010

Optimum Releasing, £15.99/£19.99

With its vision of feral hoodies stalking a typical British school, *F* is like something ripped from a *Daily Mail* reader's worst nightmares. The film begins with an all-too-believable incident in which Bob, a middle-aged teacher (the excellent David Schofield), is violently assaulted by a pupil, and – in our 'all must have prizes' society – is informed by the ghastly, PC headmistress (don't worry, she'll get it later) that he shouldn't have given the little blighter an 'F' grade. Suspended for the rest of the school year, Bob returns to the frontline a nervous wreck, mumbling his way through classes on *King Lear*, hitting the bottle at break time, and laughed at by his colleagues. Things come to a disastrous head when he keeps his now increasingly estranged daughter back for detention. As the school empties and darkness falls, it soon becomes clear that something is stalking the corridors and classrooms... security guards and late-working librarians, watch out!

The well-tried premise – a group of disparate individuals besieged in an isolated spot – works wholly in the film's favour, giving it a pleasingly old school (ahem) single-mindedness. Its departure from formula is in focusing on the threat's ambiguous nature: are the faceless hoodies (Cameron wouldn't want to hug this lot!) a gang of disaffected

NEETs with a grudge against teachers, or – like Cronenberg's *Brood* – a deadly, externalised horror from Bob's disturbed psyche? The film offers no neat explanations, and is admirably and bleakly open-ended. Taut direction, good location work and convincing performances make this a satisfying and solid low budget chiller.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict

GUARANTEED TO GIVE TEACHERS NIGHTMARES **7**

Amer

Dir Helen Cattet and Bruno Forzani, Belgium 2009

Anchor Bay, £15.99/£19.99

If the *gialli* of Bava and Argento at their best seemed to take the genre and push it as far as the envelope would allow, then this bizarre new Belgian quasi-homage simply rips said envelope up, abandoning the plodding narrative armature that traditionally held together the sequence of bloody set pieces and the genre's most striking visual tropes (spooky childhood memorabilia, voyeuristic peering through keyholes, black-gloved hands, switchblades hovering over eyeballs or slicing through clothes and flesh) and extending them into a near-abstract, hallucinatory visual trip. Lurid coloured lighting and a witchy woman straight out of *Suspiria*; a relentless masked and black-gloved killer; a soundtrack lifted from '60s and '70s Italian records, more *Vampiros Lesbos* than *Deep Red*. Co-directors Helene Cattet and Bruno Forzani clearly love their source material.

The film also exaggerates the vein of perverse eroticism running through the genre – in fact, it magnifies it to such an extent that, by blowing up every downy hair or blade of grass to gigantic close-up, the entire world of the film seems to breathe a powerful, polymorphous perversity, with even plants and insects becoming part of its all-engulfing sense of sexuality.

It's a film in three thematically linked sections, following the childhood Anna growing up in a rambling and nightmare-filled mansion in the South of France, the adolescent Anna, just realising her sexual powers, going for a trip to the local village with her weird mum, and the adult Anna returning to her now abandoned childhood home and winding up in a violent *giallo*, possibly of her own imagining. It's impossible, really, to summarise this largely non-narrative film, which contains barely a word of dialogue; at times startlingly, almost irritatingly beautiful, it will probably delight and infuriate viewers in equal measure.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict

STYLE OVER SUBSTANCE, OR HALLUCINATORY VISION? **6**

Alien vs Ninja

Dir Seiji Chiba, Japan 2010

Revolver Entertainment, £12.99

Aliens vs Ninja, or *AVN* as future generations of film buffs will surely know it, is a kung fu sci-fi gore-fest in which our heroes are a motley crew of emo-like ninjas who enjoy nothing more than going on missions, slapping each other on the back and throwing ninja stars at each other for fun. That is until a meteor full of half-dolphin, half-human aliens lands near their village and kills everyone.

The economy of script is clearly inspired by haiku, and the music and plot by Sega Megadrive.

AVN's journey is one of loss, revenge and gory glory. I was on the edge on my seat when an alien tried to rape the lady ninja, and was sure all was lost when another dapper ninja awoke to find himself hanging upside down, bound with his friend's intestines and impregnated with a baby alien. I cowered in fear when a squad of impregnated zombie ninjas started chanting "fuck you" in English – but luckily there is a stupid ninja whose goofy ways of falling over do much to lighten the mood. Once everybody is dead, and the protagonists seem to be out of the woods, the cool ninja says to the dapper one, "I hate reaching into your throat," and they all laugh. Clearly something is lost in translation, though perhaps they are making a joke about kissing? I don't know.

With Oscar-losing performances from Mika Hijii and Ben Hiura and some unspecial effects, *Aliens vs Ninja* is bound to cement its place in cinema history.

George Binning

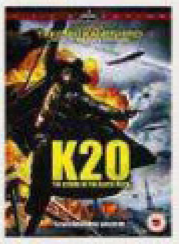
Fortean Times Verdict

A HIGHLY RECOMMENDED TWO OUT OF TEN **2**

SHORTS

K-20: THE LEGEND OF THE BLACK MASK

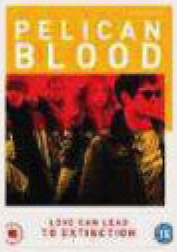
(Manga Entertainment, £15.99/£19.99)



In 1949, in an alternative history to the one in which we find ourselves, WWII never happened and Teito is the Imperial Capital of Japan. Society is sharply divided between rich and poor, and home to villainous thief and master of disguise K-20, "the Fiend with 20 Faces". The police are closing in, and so K-20 frames an innocent circus performer, Endo, for his crimes. Endo escapes, and realises that in order to clear his name (and save the world, incidentally) he must take on K-20 at his own game... This is unpretentious, silly fun, without being as self-consciously ironic as some recent Hollywood superhero efforts, and boasts good pacing, decent stunts, feisty, charismatic leads, and a monster Tesla coil. Some of the CGI is weak, there are jarring transitions between the film's modern and steampunk environments, and we're left with far too many incoherencies and loose ends, but overall Shimako Sato's film is amiable, escapist blockbuster fare. **Jen Ogilvie 6/10**

PELICAN BLOOD

(Icon Home Entertainment, £12.99)



"Love can lead to Extinction... an atmospheric edgy paean to that one mad love affair we all live to regret." Yes, Karl Golden's 2010 film takes itself very seriously indeed and would love to believe it's the natural successor to every worthy British film from *Kes* to *Trainspotting*. Easily the best thing about this gross dollop of solipsistic waffle is Harry Treadaway (as sub-goth birdwatcher Stevie), who is building up a fine and naturally quirky CV (Joy Division drummer Steven Morris in *Control* and quite brilliant, along with twin Luke, in *Brothers of the Head*). But not even he can save a film where lovers meeting on an Internet suicide chatroom site express less passion than Kerry Katona pontificating about frozen foods. Emma Booth plays Stevie, 'nutter-girlfriend-from-hell', a vegan, eco-warrior agitator for Save the Badgers (I kid you not), who wanders around in a fetching – if utterly inappropriate – leather jacket. Ironic characterisation or lazy and unfocused writing? I'm tempted to guess it's the latter. With dialogue that would have Samuel Beckett snoring loudly, ("What's the point? ... There is no point."), unengaging characters and a 'vibrant' (ie, bloody annoying) soundtrack, utterly at odds with its subject matter, I really hope this doesn't become a cult favourite. **Tim Weinberg 4/10**

AND SOON THE DARKNESS

(Optimum Home Entertainment, £15.99/£19.99)

AND SOON THE DARKNESS

In this remake of Robert Fuest's 1970 original, Marcos Efron scrapes the bottom of the casting barrel to find another couple of hateful skinny white girls to pack off to foreign lands. This time we're in Argentina, and our two flirty airheads have abandoned their organised cycling holiday and pedalled off alone. Hollywood Hicksville being what it is, it comes as no surprise (to the viewer at least – everyone knows horror movies are banned at starlet farms) to learn that girls have been going missing in these 'ere parts; our heroines, as unburdened by common sense as they are by clothing, are clearly going to be next. The camerawork is pretty, if lecherous, but the acting's terrible, the plot's predictable, and the stereotyping is grotesque. And unnecessary; there's no need to invoke evil slimy foreigners – if girls like this really existed, you could put them on set with the Muppets and they'd still wind up dead. **JO 3/10**

Dead Space 2

PC £34.99, Xbox360, PS3 £44.99, EA/Visceral Games

"IIIIiiiissssaac..."

Right from the ghostly siren call of your dead girlfriend at the start of the game, you know this is pitch-perfect horror. For EA Games, producers of various sport and movie tie-ins, the first *Dead Space* must have been a gamble. Visceral Games had developed Bond and other movie tie-ins, so a new survival horror looking like *Resident Evil* in space was a brave bet for its publisher. Luckily it paid off. *Dead Space* was a tense, creative horror outing. Freakish beasts, beastly puzzles and unique environments branded it on the minds of horror gaming fans across the world and we wanted more. *Dead Space 2* has finally arrived – and what a disgustingly beautiful nightmare it is.

Found floating in deep space, Isaac is rescued and taken to the hospital on one of Saturn's moons, part of the huge colony known as the Sprawl. Eager to discover what happened, the doctors interrogate him; but Isaac is suffering from mental collapse and guilt-ridden dreams about his dead girlfriend and crew mates. So they zip him up in a straitjacket, lock the door and throw away the key.

Then, Hell breaks loose. Luckily, a shadowy group realise that poor deranged Isaac is just the man for the clean up job and free him. So, once again, Isaac finds himself confronting the nasty Necromorphs and the sinister Church of Unitology.

Fans of the first game will feel right at home (although you wouldn't want to live there) with third person combat controls, the unique dismemberment system and the stasis/gravity gun remaining unchanged. However, the zero-gravity areas now allow full freedom to fly around, aided by a new jet suit, broadening the gameplay and delivering superb new action sequences.

From start to finish, this is a supremely polished, freaky as hell game. Graphics are sharper and lighting is wonderfully atmospheric. Environments look even better than the gorgeous concept art, from the eerie green rays through the slits in your visor to the meticulously detailed locations of the once-populous Sprawl, each carefully set with props, bodies or clues to communicate a visual narrative to the player. Discovering the aftermath of events and implicitly revealing the cause keeps you constantly on edge.

It is worth purchasing a 5.1 system for the excellent use of sound, because although I couldn't say as much for the music, the atmosphere is an experience all by itself. Isaac's name is occasionally whispered through the rear speakers and aural effects can either pack a punch or chill your spine. The moment before your first encounter with the Stalkers in the Unitology church, you *sense* the imminent attack as animalistic shrieks and scurrying sounds encircle you; it's particularly distressing.

Adding a multiplayer mode to singleplayer experiences containing strong established narratives and complete worlds can be tricky, resulting in tacked on Deathmatch affairs. *Assassins Creed Brotherhood* succeeded in crafting a unique multiplayer which utilised the skills and devices that players had gathered during the singleplayer game. While *Dead Space 2* multiplayer is not unique, recalling the Vs. Mode of *Left 4 Dead,* it adds objectives to the mix. In a welcome addition, it provides a gameplay twist with the chance to become a Necromorph and prevent humans from completing their missions.

Dead Space 2 is a must-buy for any fan of the original or survival horror games in general, delivering insane action sequences and whisper-quiet moments of foreboding with equal skill and ingenuity. Play this one with the lights out, and be afraid. Be very afraid.

Alexander Norman

Fortean Times Verdict

IT'S DEAD GOOD TO BE SPACED OUT AGAIN – A MUST-BUY **9**

Lionheart: Kings' Crusade

PC £34.99, Paradox Interactive

Lionheart: Kings' Crusade certainly plays fast and loose with historical accuracy, but if you're a fan of mediæval RTS games you probably won't mind when there's plenty of fun to be had playing fast and loose on the battlefield. Plunged right into the midst of the Third Crusade with Richard the Lionheart, you have a choice of four factions in pursuit of fortune and spiritual glory, each faction – the French King, The Holy Roman Empire, the Papal Court and the Templars – having its own strengths, whether it's an emphasis on cavalry, heroic enhancement, formidable infantry units or greater morale in the field. Individual missions will earn you 'Fame Points' to unlock the special units and abilities. Once you have triumphed in the Crusader campaign and conquered the Holy Land, you can embark upon the Saracen Campaign led by Saladin, to free the lands of the incumbent Crusaders; plenty to get your gauntlets into, then.

The ability to customise your army with unique traits, and flexibility on the battlefield in terms of formation and strategic manœuvring, provides a satisfying payoff when you get it right. The skills your particular units gain in the thick of the fight make it a paramount concern to keep them alive throughout the war. When they're gone, they're gone. The RPG element includes relics, potions and elixirs you can purchase with battle booty to enhance health, strength and morale. The environments have been designed with more colour and character than some recent mediæval outings and the mission variety thrown into the mix makes *Lionheart: Kings' Crusade* what any good RTS should be: immersive and progressive. There is the added dimension that acts of martial and strategic importance can earn you favour among the Courts of Europe.

The game interface is stylishly designed without being cluttered. The map itself doesn't possess the turn-based sophistication of the *Total War* franchise, with micromanagement of countries, but the RTS element in the development and tweaking of your army makes up for it. There may not be a huge population of forces rendered on screen either, but the ability to get amidst the grit of battle, right down to blades of metal and grass, adds to gaming immersion.

There are quibbles: the tutorial and in-battle voice-over for one; to my knowledge there were no American accents around then. It's also a game that requires at least another patch to make it run smoothly. You don't want it to crash right at the end of a mission, because you can't save during one. But if other releases on PC with much bigger logistical muscle at their command enter the fray without all the right equipment then developers Neocore deserve some slack. Any game that dares employ a title requiring a plural possessive apostrophe shows that there's hope for civilisation yet!

Nick Cirkovic

Fortean Times Verdict

NOT THE KING OF MEDIÆVAL RTS, BUT PRINCELY ENOUGH **7**

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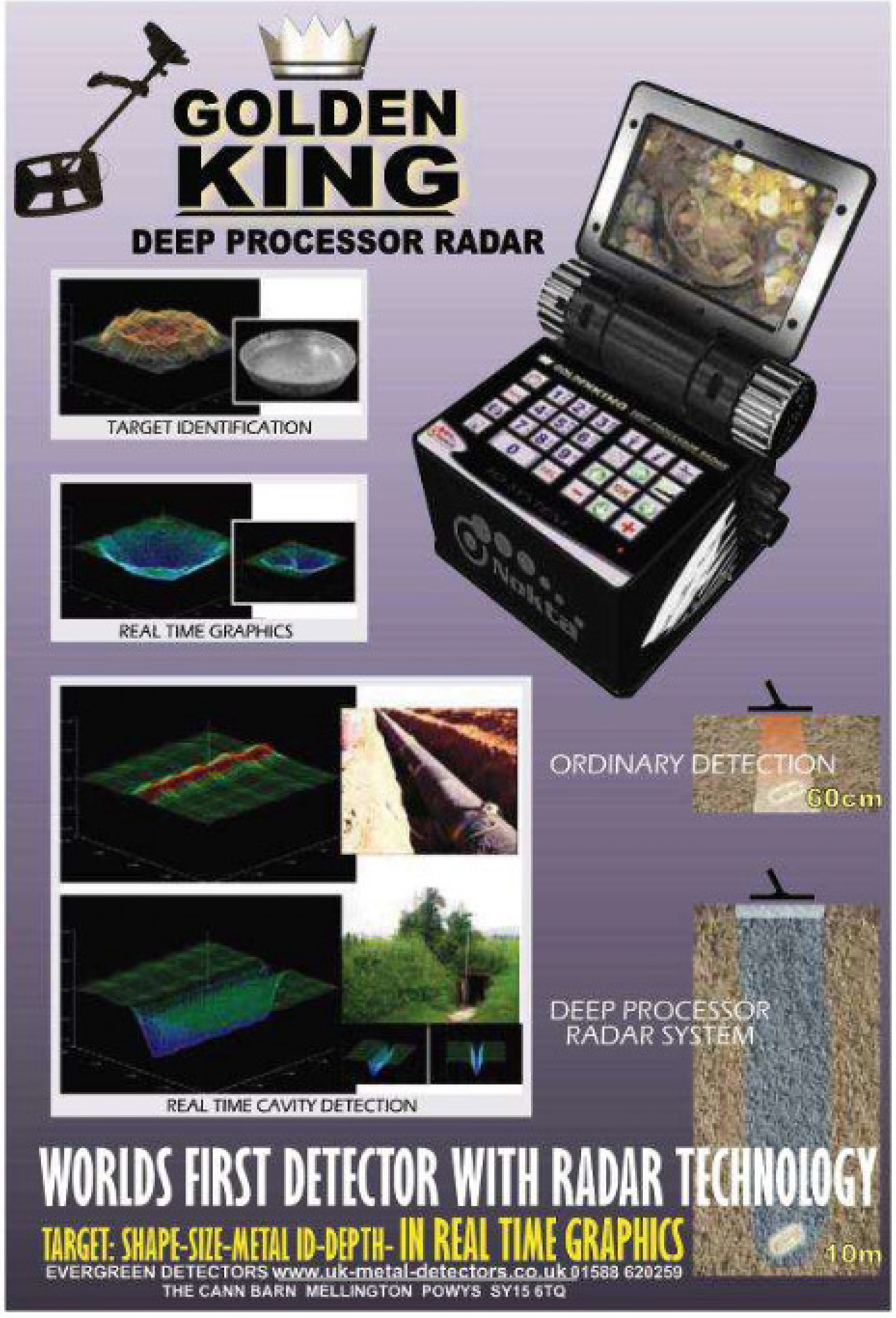
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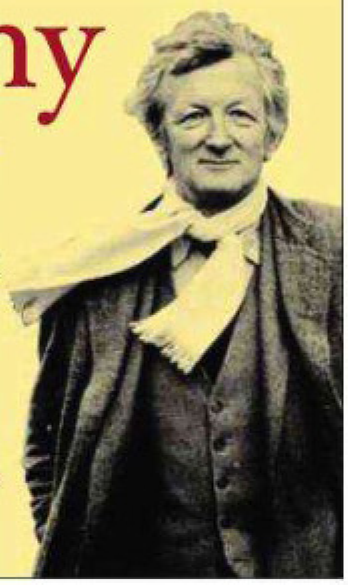

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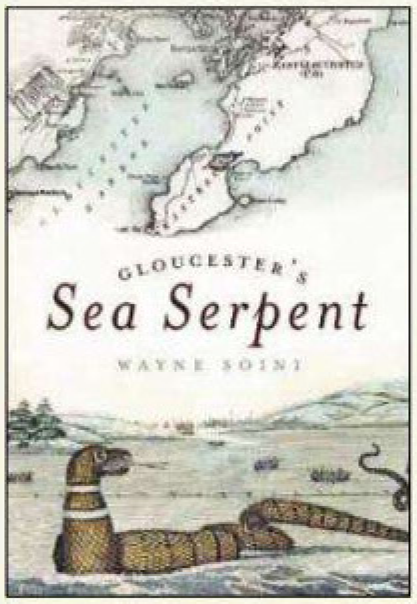
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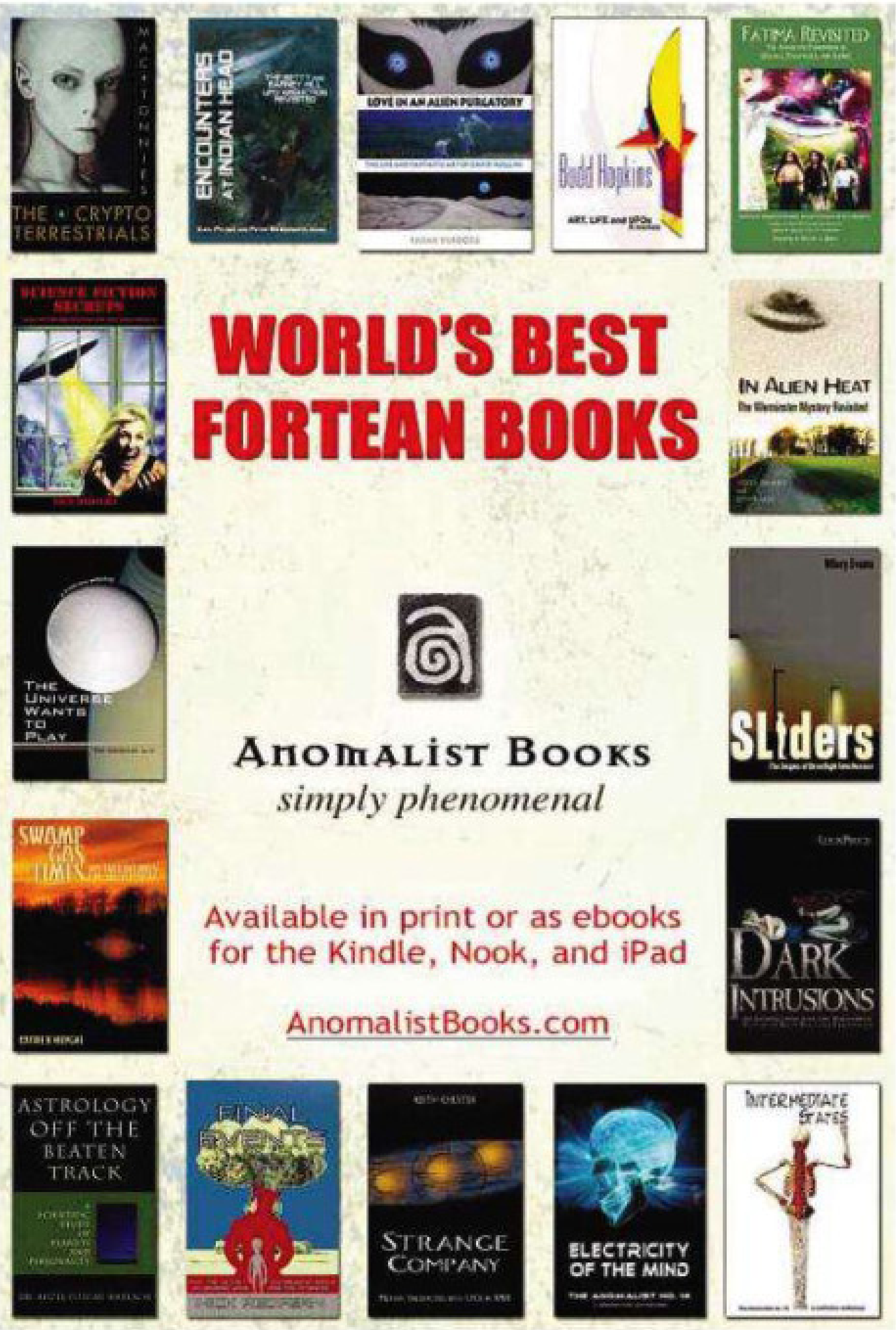
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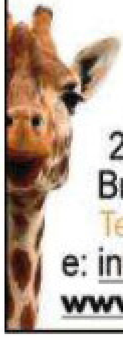

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letters

Dowsing

In response to Oliver Tate's query regarding dowsing usage [**FT271:74**], we bought a house in South Wales not far from Cardiff in early 2007. It was at the top of a hill and had poor water pressure, necessitating the employment of some contractors to reroute pipes and undertake other works. It soon became clear that historic plans had very little resemblance to the actual underground location and route of supply pipes, which first needed to be located.

Without comment, the lead labourer produced his dowsing rods and quickly gave a judgement to his foreman on the route of the pipe – which subsequently proved to be 100 per cent accurate and completely different from the plans. On enquiry, it was clear that this was just another tool used routinely. He had no idea of the underlying principles at play, but used it successfully on a regular basis – as apparently do many pipe-laying contractors.

Richard Sexton
Twyn Yr Odyn, South Glamorgan

In the late 1960s, I was a trainee technician with the GPO (later BT). We had the job of finding the route of an underground duct on an Epsom school field. It was not shown on any plan and could not be located by the usual means. Harry, the elderly gang foreman, bent two pieces of thick copper wire into an L-shape and holding them in each hand walked slowly across the field with arms held out in front of him. At one point, the wires began to move inwards and eventually crossed. About three feet down, we came across the duct. I later asked a GPO training school supervisor about this and he told me that it was a known technique but not one that was taught in the school.

Pete Gallon
By email

When I was an apprentice builder in 1986/87, my boss had two bent copper rods in his toolbox and while renovating an old coach-house he had to locate the old drain. He walked across the ground with rods in hand until they parted. "Dig along that line," he said, and about two or three feet down we found the old dry drainage pipe. I saw him do the same thing again in a working textile mill, through a concrete floor about a foot thick. I had a go myself, but can't remember if I struck lucky; I guess you have to practise.

Tony Harrison
Meltham, West Yorkshire

Bell, book and candle

It is with a sense of *déjà vu* that I find myself writing to point out that you have once again [**FT270:8**] incorrectly used the phrase "bell, book and candle" in reference to exorcism. As I have pointed out previously [**FT191:74**, Dec 2004], "bell, book and candle" refers to a Catholic ritual of excommunication, not exorcism. The bell is the passing bell of (spiritual) death, the book symbolises the closing of the book of life and the snuffing of the candle represents the extinguishing of the Light of God in the excommunicant, who becomes a lost soul.

Mark Graham
By email

Further education

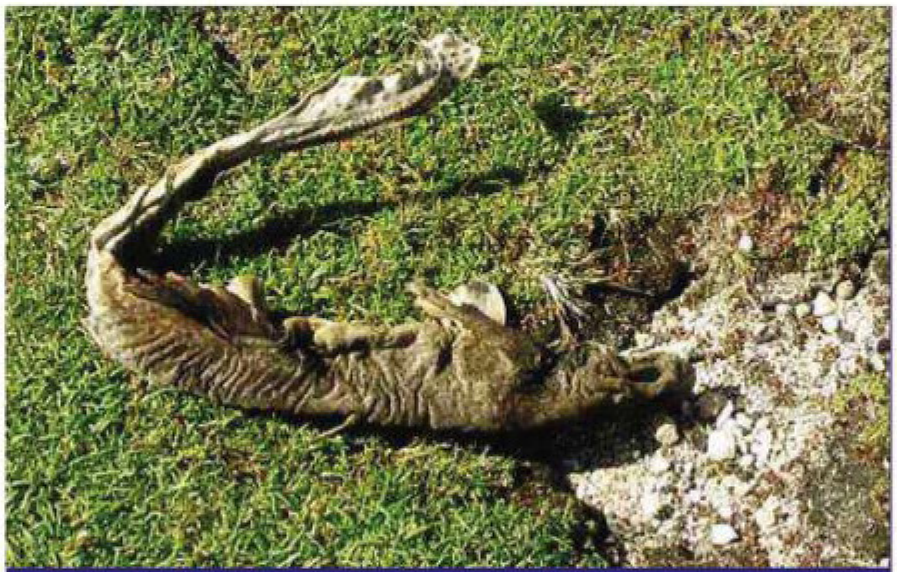
How appropriate that the MSc in Parapsychology offered by Coventry University [**FT271:13**], including a module on "Extrasensory Perception and Psychokinesis", is undertaken... "by Distance Learning".

Martin Stubbs
London

Shetland mystery

I am 87 and all my colleagues are dead. I feel it is time to tell this story, as the secret need not be kept any longer. In 1985, I joined a research platform in the North Sea. My job was to man the bathysphere and watch for the return of the divers. One morning, a diver reported a lost city beneath the waves. The following evening, the folk of Shetland recounted a legend of an ancient city that sank to the seabed when the ice receded at the end of the last Ice Age. I wonder if this gave rise to the Atlantis legend. Our number three (reserve diver) reportedly took a picture of a creature with somewhat human characteristics but no facial features, which he encountered on the seabed. It was said to be very old and pale-looking and seemed to regard our man with curiosity. Our chief navigator was a Mr Stanley (?), and he retained the picture. I left the team in 1987 to pursue a career in radio journalism and a business, and I lost contact with my colleagues. I have heard nothing further of any search for this submerged city. I am too old for publicity as I am confined to bed.

Arthur Steisant
Moroccan ex-pat



Tory Island critter

I photographed this creature on Tory Island, off the coast of Co. Donegal in Ireland, in June 2010. It was about 25cm (10in) long, and was found near the cliffs, 100m (330ft) inland, about 50m (165ft) above sea level. Is it a mammal or a reptile? Could it have been dropped by a bird? **Yvonne Bolte** *By email*

Magic blindfolds

In Jeffrey Vallance's article "The Medium is the Message" [**FT269:48**], we read how two artists channel spirits with a Ouija board while wearing blackout masks, "to quell any suspicion of shenanigans, quackery and the like". Well, all magicians who perform blindfold can actually see, you know – that's how they do it. Sorry if this spoils it for anyone. Magic blindfolds can be made opaque when tested by members of the audience, but are transparent otherwise. I worked with a magician whose speciality was a "spectacular blindfold drive" at village fêtes. Wearing a "tested" blindfold, he would drive through a crowd without killing anyone, then show off with a few handbrake turns. The audience loved it, never suspecting he could see.

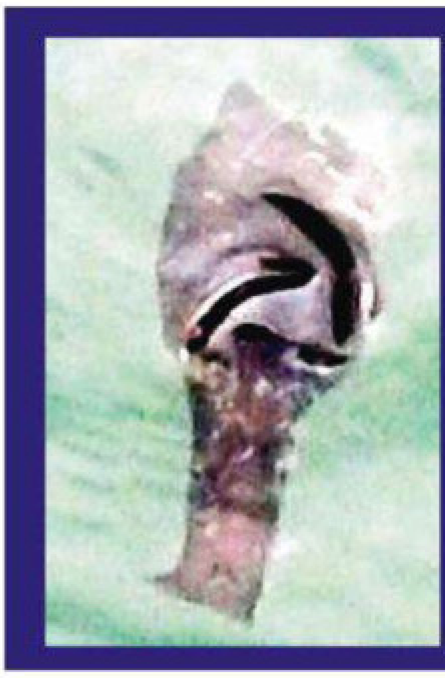
Steve Marshall
Yatesbury, Wiltshire

Selective evidence

Mark Greener's medical column [**FT271:14**] with the pull quote "These results rip scientific beliefs to shreds" regarding the efficacy of prayer on distance healing seems to be in direct contrast to the conclusions of the Cochrane Collaboration. Their conclusion in the article states that "The evidence does not support a recommendation either in favour or against the use of intercessory prayer." Mr Greener then concludes that "[T]he results will revolutionise our understanding of the Universe." I think not.

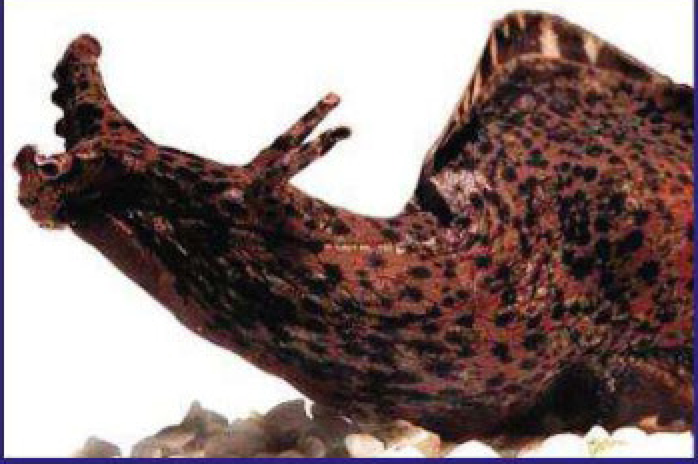
Martin Henderson
York

letters



Sea hare

Simon Matthews's "Thing in the water" [**FT270:71**] is a soft-bodied gastropod of the family Aplysiidæ commonly called a 'sea hare' (pictured right). These are hermaphrodite herbivores with a minimal internal shell, and are soft to the touch. They propel themselves with two rippling wing-like appendages or parapodia, projecting from the sides of their bodies, aptly described by Joseph Matthews as looking like "two black flippers". In the published photo the head of the sea hare is facing downward, and its right-sided head-tentacle can be clearly seen. Sea hares are favourites among divers and biologists as their overall appearance is faintly comical, and somewhat adorable. A Google Image search finds quite a few pictures that are similar to the Matthews photo.



COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, NEW YORK

Ken Crocker *Newfoundland, Canada*

Creepy critters

Re the Talking Mongoose [**FT269:32–40**]: when seeking for antecedents to Gef, one can't overlook the poltergeist phenomena at Epworth rectory in Lincolnshire, which bedevilled the family of the Rev. Samuel Wesley in December 1716 and January 1717. There were knockings galore, a sound like a huge stone smashing bottles, groanings, and footsteps. Like Mr Irving, Wesley kept a diary of events. In his book *Poltergeists* (1940), Sacheverall Sitwell points out that Epworth was a lonely, isolated place, and indeed draws several parallels with Cashen's Gap.[1]

More to the point, strange animals were seen in the house. Mrs Wesley, in a letter to her son, writes that she was called to the nursery by one of the terrified Wesley daughters: "Upon my looking under the bed, something ran out pretty much like a badger, and seemed to run directly under Emily's petticoats, who sat opposite to me on the other side."[2] Robin Brown, a manservant, saw something near the kitchen fireplace that resembled a white rabbit with its ears pressed down along its neck. It disappeared as he chased it with a set of tongs. Best of all, an older daughter, Emily, named the entity "Jeffry", and all the family came to call it that![3] The Rev. Wesley tried to get Jeffry to speak, but he did not meet with the Irvings' success. He heard "only once or twice two or three feeble squeaks, a little louder than the chirping of a bird, but not like the noise of rats".[4]

- Re insects and ghosts [**FT269:16–17**]: Frank Hamel's *Human Animals* contains a story about a nasty supernatural insect, taken in turn from *Superstitions et Survivances* (1896) by someone named Berenger-Feraud. In a house near Toulon, a woman had been sitting up with her father, who was very old and sick. Several neighbours visited to help out and allow the daughter to get some much-needed rest. As she talked to them in the kitchen, the old man cried out in pain and fear. Everyone ran to the bedroom and found "a huge stinging-fly which hovered round and round him, buzzing in a horrible manner".

The insect was so huge and aggressive the visitors were loath to get near it. It landed on the old man again and again, causing him to scream in pain. "Those who were near him could see large black blisters rising at the spots where the stinging-fly attacked him." Finally one of the men knocked the monster insect to the floor with his hat, picked it up with a pair of tongs, and threw it outside.

To everyone's horror, "[T]hey could plainly hear the buzz of the insect outside. The noise was so loud that the windows positively rattled. Then a howl arose outside, a cry so strange that no one present ever heard the like." Silence followed, but now the visitors wished to stay the night because no one wanted to go outside with the giant fly! The old man could only say that he woke to the insect's buzz and that it started attacking him.

The next morning, the people in the cottage ventured out. The insect lay dead on the ground. It did not appear to be a real insect, "but merely its outer shell or covering, just like the skin sloughed by a grasshopper". The general consensus was that it was the creation of a sorcerer, and the "howl" was the evil magician's cry of anger at being thwarted.[5]

NOTES

1 Sacheverell Sitwell: *Poltergeists* (University Books, New York, 1959 [1940]), pp84–86.

2 Harry Price: *Poltergeist Over England* (Bracken Books, 1993 [1945]), p98. Both Price and Sitwell contain the letters and diary entries of the various Wesleys.

3 *ibid.*, p91.

4 *ibid.*, p95.

5 Frank Hamel: *Human Animals* (University Books, New York, 1969 [1915]), pp246–248.

Michael D Winkle
Tulsa, Oklahoma

Armed to the teeth

The "Security Glitch" sideline [**FT269:11**] marvels that a Cairo-bound airline passenger was able to get "two pistols, 250 bullets, two swords and 11 knives" through airport security in New York. In fact, the passenger may not have broken any rules stateside. As other news accounts made clear, the weapons hoard was part of his checked luggage – and dropping off your arsenal at the check-in desk for tagging and later pickup is perfectly legal in the United States, as long as you pack it and report it correctly. In fact, an airliner's passenger cabin is one of the few places in the United States where a citizen *can't* carry a gun, and there are exceptions even then: police, for example. Y'all come visit.

Andy Duncan
Frostburg, Maryland

Mothman influences

Benjamin Radford's article on HR Giger and the chupacabra(s) [**FT271:30–35**] sent me scurrying to unearth some notes I made years ago about the Mothman case [see our Mothman Special, **FT156**]. 1962 saw a low-budget science fiction movie called *Mothra*, in which a female moth with an 800ft (250m) wingspan defies the atomic heat rays of the US military to rescue two pigmy princesses abducted by an evil entrepreneur for a freak show (Jeff Rovin: *An Encyclopædia of Monsters*, 1989). This farrago of implausibilities even spawned sequels such as *Godzilla Versus Mothra* (1964).

Prior to this, American filmgoers had witnessed *The Giant Locusts* (1957), and a gargantuan wasp in *The Monsters From Green Hell* (1958); and an episode of *The Twilight Zone* from October 1963 entitled "The Wing Gremlin" related such entities to UFO phenomena.

Mothman, whatever its

gender, has much more credibility than Madelyne Tolentino's chupacabra(s). But could these cinematic images have influenced the experiences around Point Pleasant?

Richard George
St Albans, Hertfordshire

A soldier's tale

Reports have appeared in several Irish newspapers regarding an Irish soldier (serving in the British Army) who defected to the German Army after being captured in the early months of World War I (some reports say he was captured in 1916); so I was interested to see the *FT* piece regarding this [**FT267:9**]. The early months of the war were not wasted by Michael Keogh, for he won The George's Cross (*sic*). Naturally he went on to win the Iron Cross after he joined the Roger Casement Brigade, a group formed to recruit Irish soldiers to fight against the British.

No details are given for the heroic acts performed by Keogh when he won these awards. A couple of problems arise: the George Cross was not instituted until 1940 and there are no records of the Roger Casement Brigade taking part in active service. But perhaps Keogh won the Iron Cross after he joined an ordinary German Unit. Apparently he had an interesting war and met the then unknown Hitler in September 1918 near Ligny on the French border, where the pair were in the same Bavarian Regiment.

After the War, Keogh joined the right-wing mercenaries, the Freikorps, who were putting down workers' uprisings throughout Germany. By 1919, he had advanced into the officers' ranks. According to his "memoirs", in April 1919 "I had fought my way into Munich as a captain in the Freikorps Epp. A few weeks later, I was the officer of the day in the Turken Strasse barracks when I got an urgent call at about eight in the evening. A riot had broken out over two political agents in the gymnasium. These 'political officers' were allowed to approach the men for votes and support. I ordered out a sergeant and six men and, with fixed bayonets, led them off. There were about 200 men in the gymnasium, among them some tough Tyrolean troops."

Once more carrying out an action worthy of a medal, Hauptman Keogh rescued the political agents in one mighty bound. Lo and behold! One of them gave his name as Hitler! It was the Lance Corporal of Ligny. He began to talk about his new party, the new National Socialist German Workers' Party.

Here again we have a problem: Hitler was a corporal in the German Army when Military Intelligence first sent him to spy on Nazi meetings. But this was on 12 September 1919. Shortly afterwards Hitler joined the National Socialist German Workers' Party. So the time-frame doesn't fit.

This whole 'My Grandfather Saved Hitler' yarn has been spread around by Kevin Keogh, grandson of the bould Michael. Apparently a mysterious priest stole the memoirs manuscript from Michael Keogh's deathbed in 1964. The manuscript turned up again in the UCD archives and was given back to the family in 2004.

The "memoirs" have now been published as *With Casement's Irish Brigade* by Choice Publishing Ltd, Drogheda. File under Fiction.

Pat Corcoran
Dublin

Pyramid geometry

Ted Harrison scorns von Däniken's connection of the measurements and Pi ("Flying Saucers of the Gods", **FT270:38**).

Pi can be obtained from the perimeter (*not* the area) of the base divided by twice the vertical height.

According to *The Pyramids of Egypt* by IES Edwards – a "respectable" academic work – the measurements of the Great Pyramid are as follows. Perimeter: 3,023.16ft (921.46m) – N.755.43ft (230.26m); S.756.08ft (230.45m); W. 755.77ft (230.36m); E. 755.88ft (230.39m). Vertical height: 481.4ft (146.73m).

Thus 3023.16 divided by (481.4x2) = 3.13997 – a difference of 0.0516 per cent from the calculated value of 3.14159.

Incidentally, Phi (the Golden Section) can also be obtained from the measurements of the Great Pyramid as the square root of half side squared plus vertical height squared divided by half side, giving 1.619511729, which compared to the value of 1.618033989 shows a variance of 0.09 per cent.

In the same article, a seminal work omitted from "Further Reading" is the first part of *Flying Saucers Have Landed* by Desmond Leslie and George Adamski (1953).

Alan H Hooker
Tunbridge Wells, Kent

Next to Jupiter

This letter concerns an observation first made by me in a rural area of Colorado around 8pm, about an hour after dark, on 3 September 2010. There appeared to be a small star or planet directly under what turned out to be Jupiter, with only a hair's breadth of separation between them. The smaller entity had a slightly orange hue. Later, in October, this was still visible on a clear night from eastern Long Island and another person could see it, but two others who wore glasses could not. My brother also said he had noticed it, prior to my mention, from his house in Michigan. This phenomenon is still [8 December] visible from Denver, but only on a clear night. According to Space.com, last September Uranus was within one degree of Jupiter, but it is also 3,000 times dimmer and not visible to the naked eye. Besides, Uranus was supposed to be slightly above Jupiter, not below, and appears pale blue, not orange.

So the smaller object can hardly be Uranus, yet cannot be anything else, unless a star were able to hold the same relative position near Jupiter for so long. Oddly enough, a star (brighter than most, thought not as bright as Jupiter) has a similar companion of the same relative brightness and position, and a very slender but distinct distance between them. This was visible in the southwest at 4:30am from Denver on 17 November and a few other times. The coincidence is odd but for both pairs of objects there has to be an explanation, which in the case of Jupiter and its mysterious companion (after so many sightings unlikely to be an optical illusion) may not be easy to obtain.

Richard Porter
Denver, Colorado

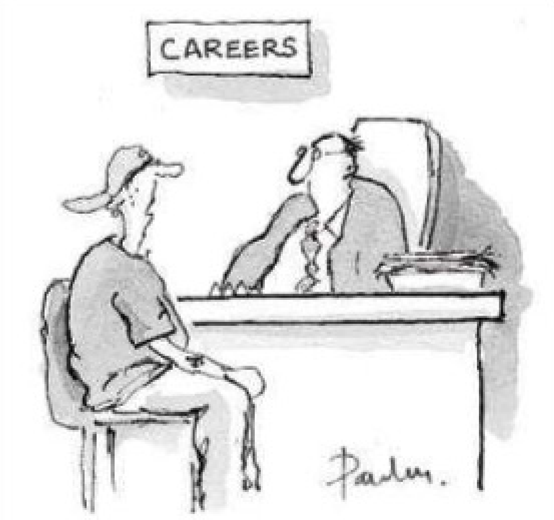
Hallucinations

I have always enjoyed readers' experiences in *FT*, but now I find myself researching them for my PhD at Coventry University. My research is based upon the 1894 SPR *Census of Hallucinations* and DJ West's 1948 and 1990 follow-up studies, and I'm asking a modified version of the original 'Census question':

Have you ever (when fully awake and unaffected by illness, alcohol or drugs) had an experience of seeing something or someone, or of hearing a voice, when there was no ordinary cause for it that you could find?

If any reader can answer positively and would be willing to complete a brief survey online, I would be delighted to hear from them. My survey can be found at www.strangesurvey.com. Please note that I am not looking for experiences that occurred while ghost-hunting, just experiences that happened unexpectedly.

Becky Smith
Derby



"I want to be the Grim Reaper."

PAUL TAYLOR

it happened to me...

Gary Numan & John Foxx

Have you had strange experiences that you cannot explain? We are always interested in reading of odd events and occurrences.
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Electronic pop musicians GARY NUMAN and JOHN FOXX share some strange personal experiences

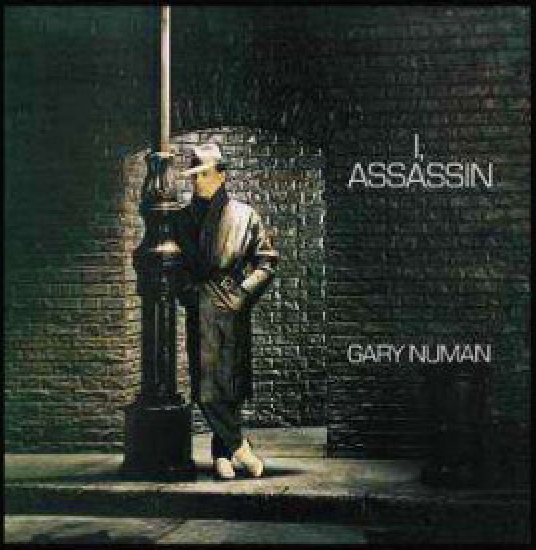
Gary Numan, pioneer of the 80s electronic music scene, best known for his hits Cars *and* Are Friends Electric *recounts an unexplained aerial phenomenon and a ghostly apparition.*

FT: *There are many documented cases of pilots reporting UFO sightings, or at least things they couldn't explain. You were once a very active pilot... in your years of flying, did you see anything that – whether you're sceptical or not about such things – remains hard to explain?*

GARY NUMAN: Nothing at all, I'm sad to say. I wish I had.

The most alarming thing that happened to me in the air was when I had bits fall off an aeroplane I was flying upside down, which certainly came as a surprise. I've also had them catch fire, break down, and scare the shit out of me on more than one occasion, but nothing of an alien or supernatural nature.

I did see something that I have never been able to explain, when I was driving home from the studio one night – a large light in the shape of an upside-down pyramid focused at a point on the road near me. I also saw a ghost once, so I am completely open to the existence of such things, both alien and supernatural.



FT: *Was that the ghost you saw on the tube at Piccadilly Circus? Could you tell us about this?*

GN: I was with a friend of mine, on our way to buy a guitar in Wardour Street. We used to sit in an end carriage, as they were a little less crowded most of the time. We got off the train at Piccadilly Circus and, chatting to each other about the band we were going to put together, we followed – without paying too much attention – the stream of passengers that had got off the train ahead of us.

Directly in front of us was an older man wearing a hat and a long grey coat, and further in front of him was a group of girls, and so on. A few people were behind us, but not many.

As we reached the top of one of the escalators, we followed the man in front around a corner to the left, walked a few more steps, and then came up against a wall. It looked as if the corridor we were in had been sealed countless years before. No sign of the man.

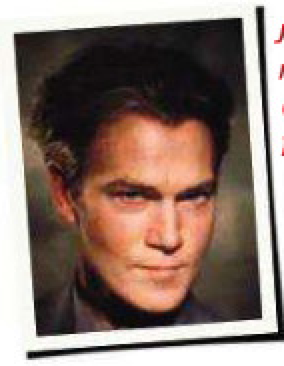
We both checked with each other that we had been following the man and then realised that all the other passengers had gone. We ran as fast as we could out of the station.

The man we saw has played a big part in my career ever since. He is drawn leaning on a wall on the cover of my *Replicas* album, and I am dressed as him on the cover of the *Dance* and *I, Assassin* album covers. He's also mentioned in many songs, including "Are 'Friends' Electric?"

GARY NUMAN will be playing live in Manchester on 1 April and, along with JOHN FOXX, in London on 2 April. For more info and to purchase tickets visit: www.backtothephuture.net.

To read the full interviews with John Foxx and Gary Numan go to www.forteantimes.com.

Gary Numan's album *Splinter* is released in May 2011.



John Foxx, multi- media artist and founder of Ultravox! on strange coincidences, exorcisms and spirituality.

FT: Has anything you would deem inexplicable or deeply strange ever occurred during any recordings you've worked on? Or outside of the recording studio?

JOHN FOXX: Oh, lots of odd, unresolved experiences. Everyone has them. Anecdotal stuff – but I do have witnesses to one or two.

I began to write a few down during one period, when something odd was happening almost every day. I remember coinciding with one woman every time I stepped out of the house – and always at the same place, but at random times – for about two weeks. I would be walking down toward the tube station and she would be walking up toward the high street. It couldn't possibly have been arranged in any way.

When I was an art student in Preston, Lancashire, I was with my girlfriend in a house on Avenham Colonade one afternoon. The relationship was just breaking up. Physically attracted, but irreconcilable – that sort of adolescent thing, so the atmosphere was very uneasy, to say the least...

Suddenly, there was a crackle of blue electrical flame in a corner of the room that startled both of us. I went over to investigate and it happened again as I was approaching. I found the carpet was damp in that spot, but there was no electrical wiring anywhere near – no identifiable cause at all. It never happened again. It felt as if all the angst, resistance and sexual desire and tension in the room had somehow manifested in that electrical short-circuit.

There have been several other incidents, all very different but equally memorable and inexplicable. I think everyone experiences these sorts of things. At their most interesting, it seems they are singularities – things that only happen once and never again.

This is an example of one of the inherent limitations of science – things must happen repeatedly in order to be examined scientifically, yet, there may be many things that only occur once. These are understandably inadmissable to science – but that doesn't mean they didn't happen.

FT: You have mentioned having had a very Catholic upbringing. Did this have an impact on your views about religion, spirituality, the afterlife and so on?

JF: Oh, I think so. For instance, my class was told exorcism stories by the priest when we'd have been around 10 years old. This was quite normal. He gave one particularly vivid account of an exhausting battle he conducted with the devil or a demon overnight. The house was by the side of a factory in Chorley and occupied by an elderly woman who was blind. Visitors would witness strange events – manifestations and objects moving.

The priest was around 30 years old then, and certainly not a liar – I'm quite certain that he believed absolutely in the truth of his experience.

My maternal grandmother was a lifelong spiritualist – front room, Lancashire-industrial variety. After my father died, she would calmly say she had been talking to him the previous night and would pass on goodwill messages from him to us. All this was quite matter-of-fact, as if she'd just met someone at the grocers. The living and the dead coexisted quite happily for her, and her view of the world included a calm, untroubled and admirably cohesive acceptance of all this.

Again, I know for certain there was no trace of fiction in any of these accounts. For her, they were as real as the weather. I seem to have grown up surrounded by stories like this. They made perfect sense in that very dark Lancashire world.

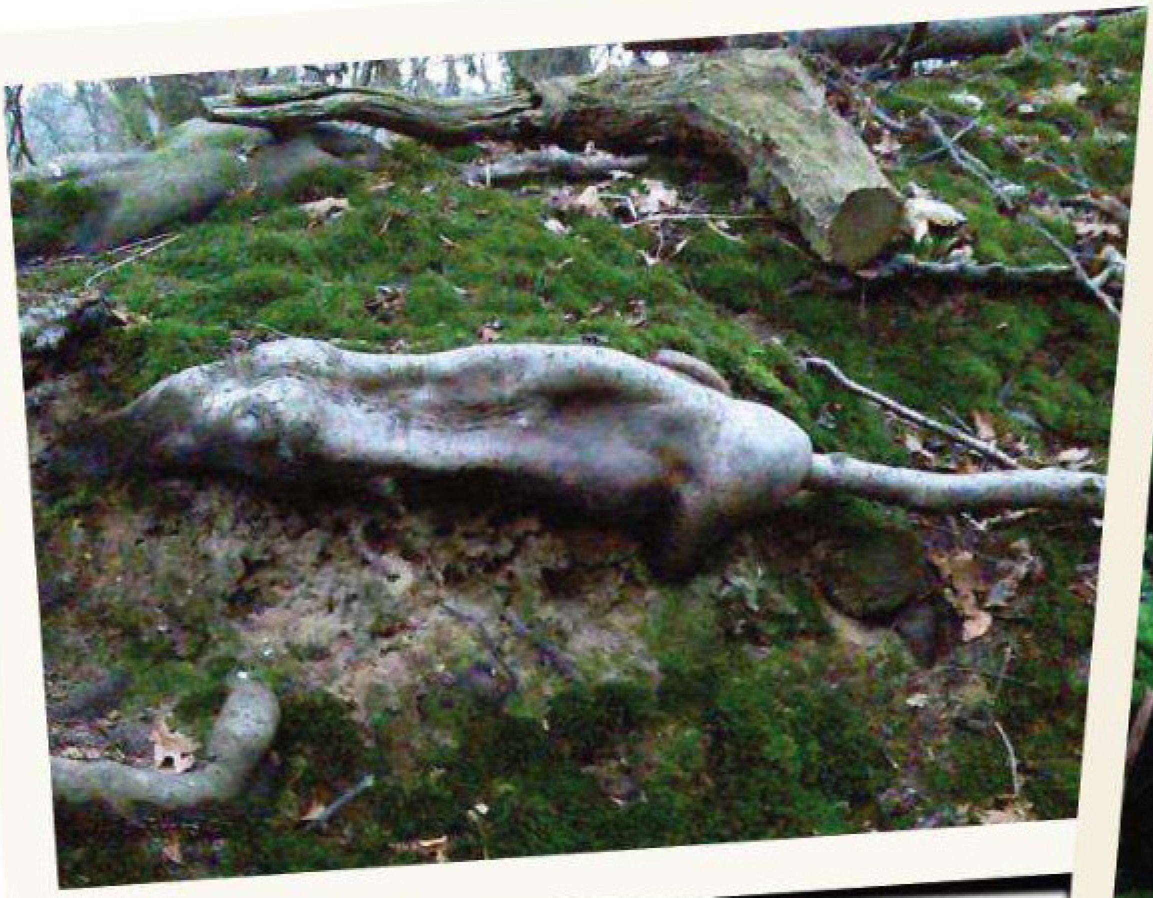
John Foxx and the Maths new album* Interplay *is out now.

JOHN FOXX

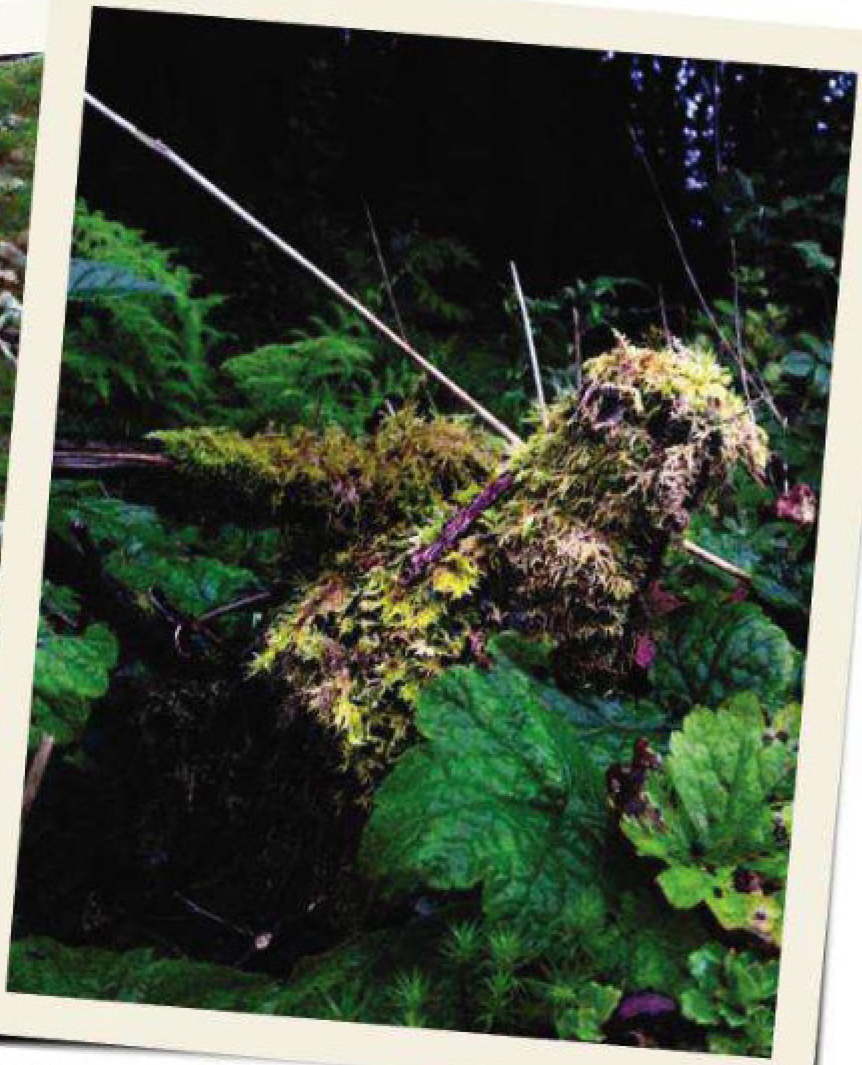
simulacra corner

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 2409 or to sieveking@forteantimes.com. If your photo is published, we'll send you an exclusive *Fortean Times* gift.

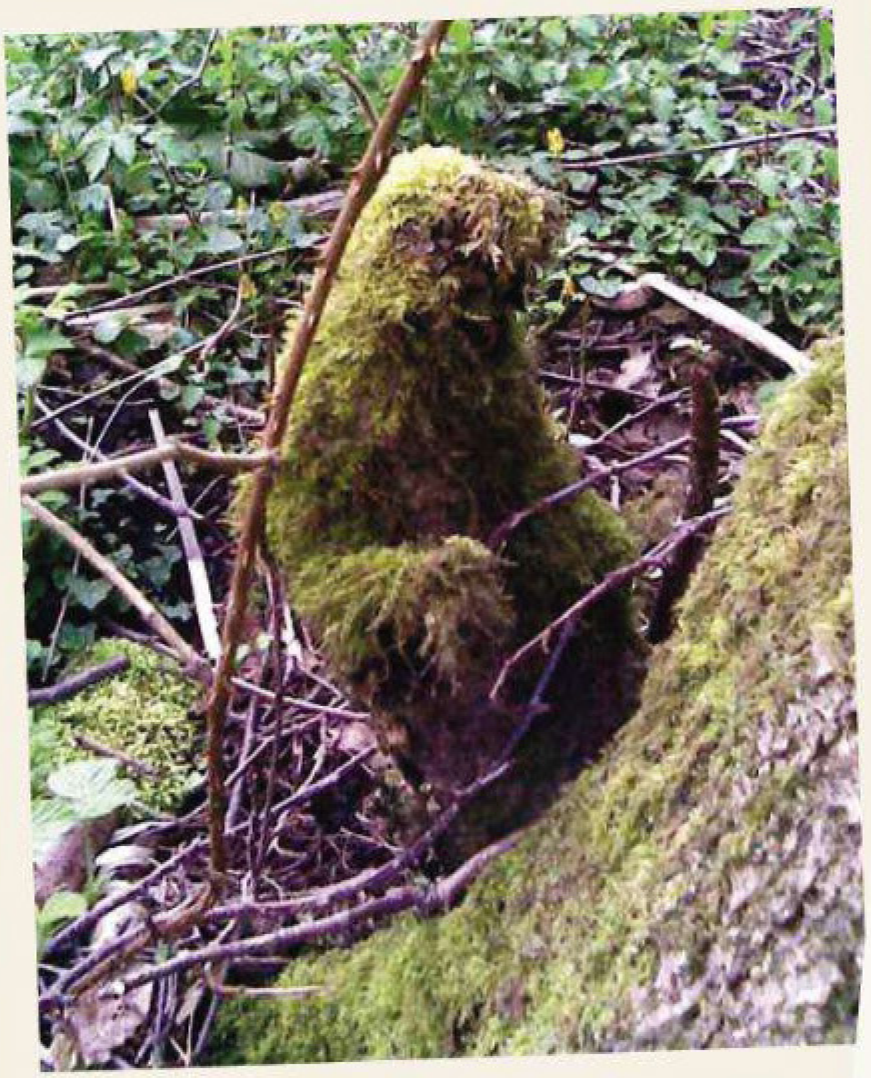
A selection of animalesque woodland imagery sent in by FT's observant readers.



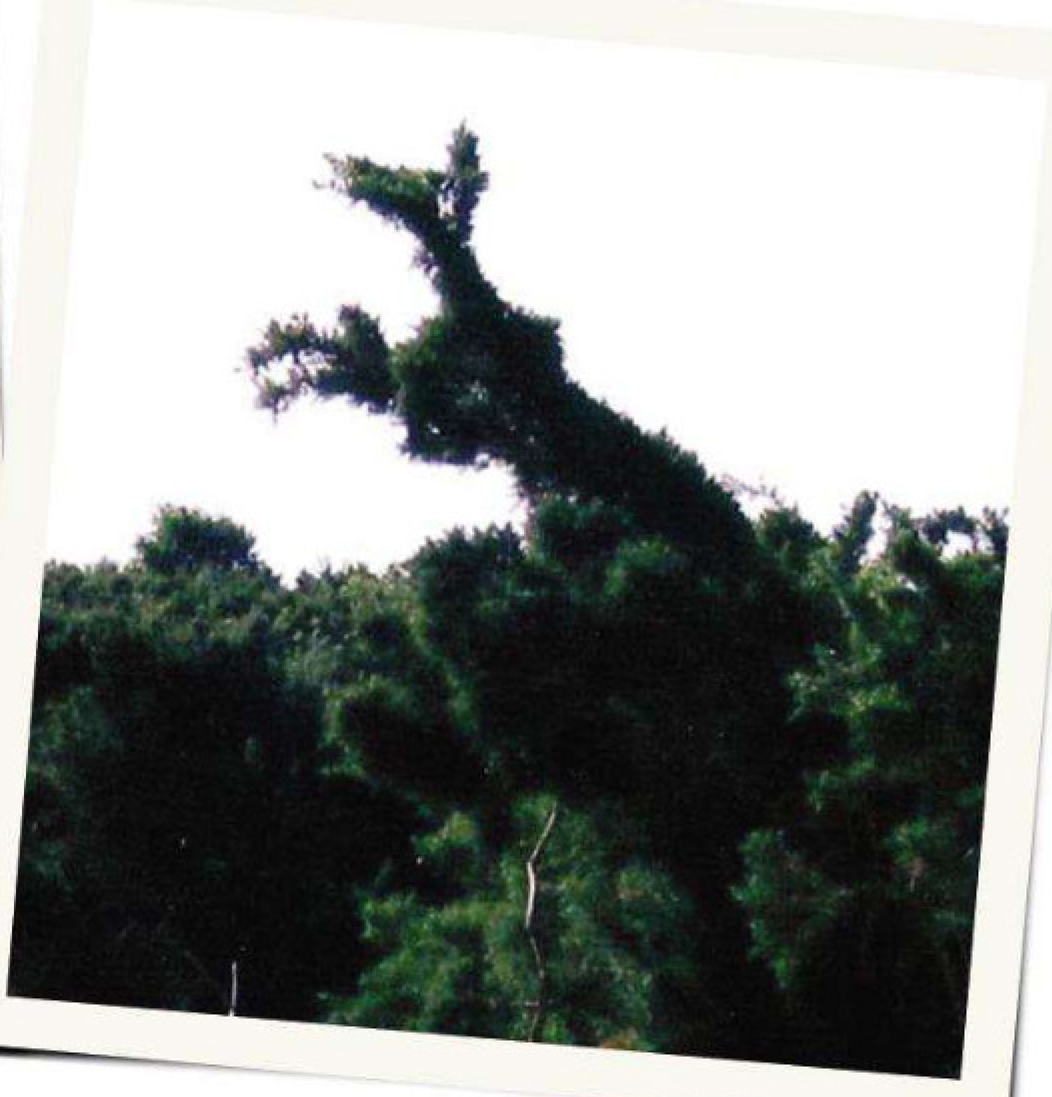
Jeff Tupholme saw this rat-like root at Chithurst in West Sussex.



Paul Aburn took this photo at Tarbet on Loch Lomond in Scotland, the day after his marriage. He thought it looked like an otter.



A tree root covered in moss photographed by Scott Devall in Alton, Staffordshire. He saw it as a yeti about to climb a tree – or sitting at a desk typing.



A leaping creature photographed in the New Forest by Tony Earle.

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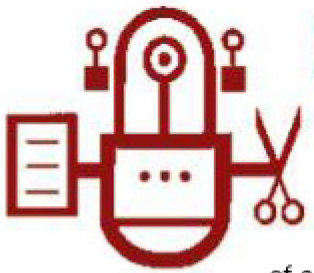

Clippers wanted!

Regular clipsters have provided the lifeblood of *Fortean Times* since it began in 1973. One of the delights for the editors is receiving packets of clips from Borneo or Brazil, Saudi Arabia or Siberia. We invite you to join in the fun and send in anything weird, from trade journals, local newspapers, extracts from obscure tomes, or library newspaper archives.

To minimise the time spent on preparing clippings for a Fort Sort, we ask that you cut them out and not fold them too small. Mark each clip (on the front, where possible) with the source, date and your name, so that we can credit you in the listing (right) when we use the material. For UK local and overseas clips, please give the town of publication. For foreign language clips, we appreciate brief translations. To avoid confusion over day and month, please write the date in this form: 8 Apr 2011. If you send photocopies, copy on one side of the paper only.

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Why Fortean?

Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

FT toes no party line.

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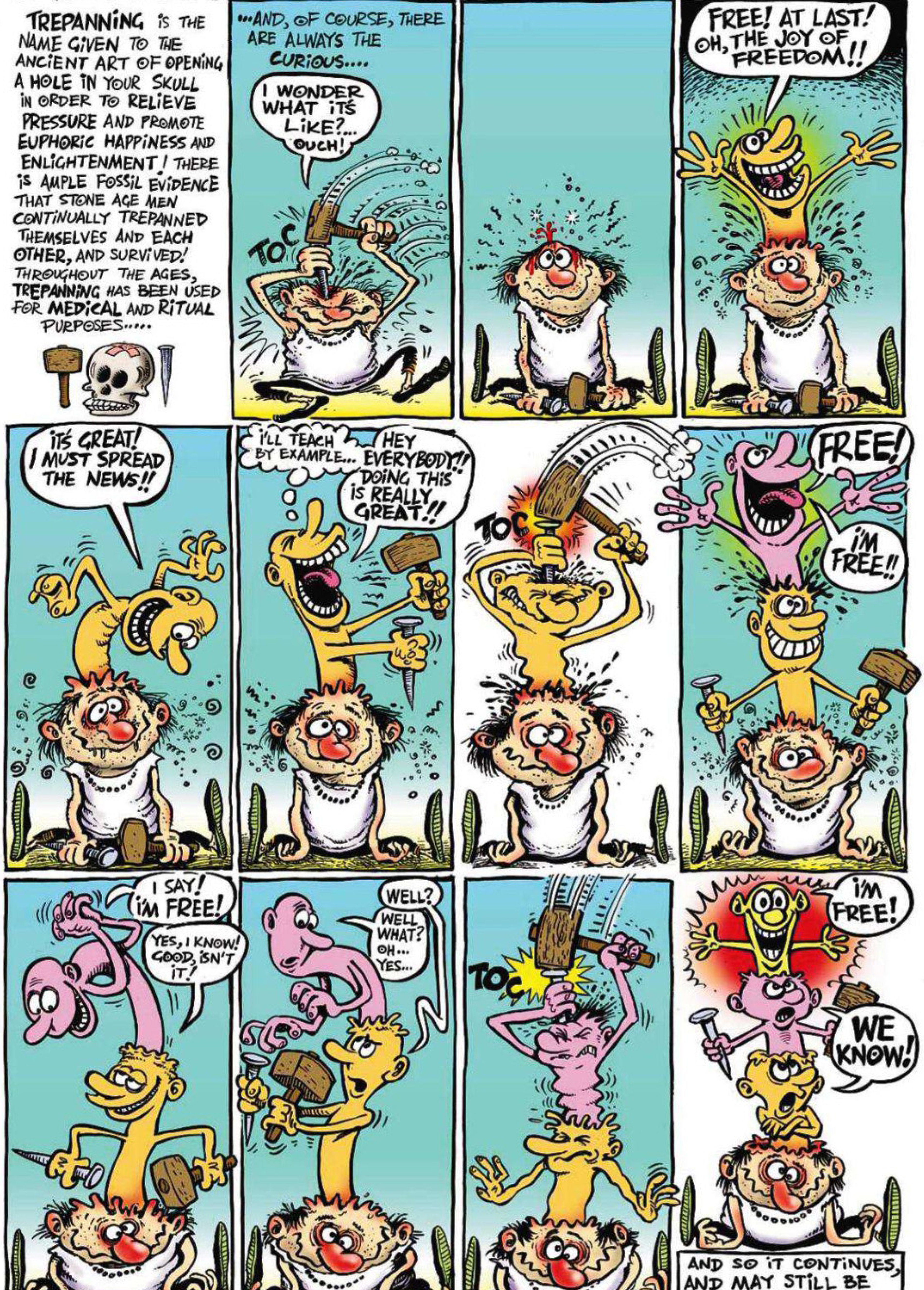
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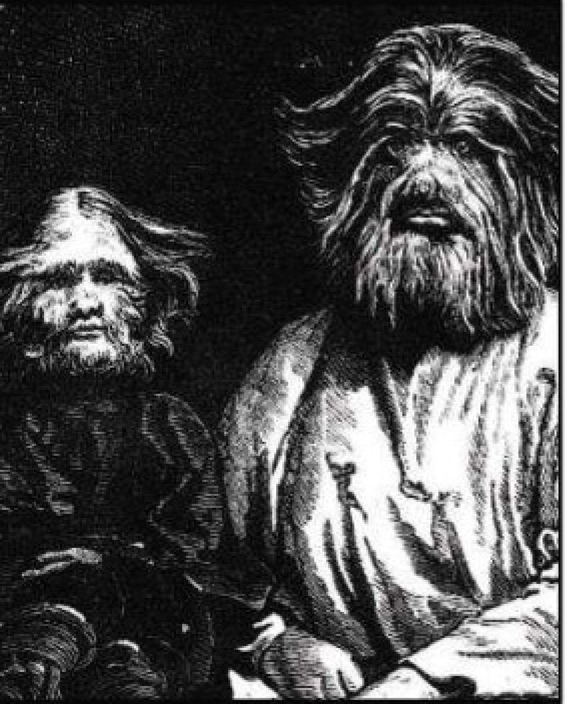
IT'S GREAT! I MUST SPREAD THE NEWS!!
I'LL TEACH BY EXAMPLE...
HEY EVERYBODY!! DOING THIS IS REALLY GREAT!!
TOC
FREE!
I'M FREE!!
I SAY! I'M FREE!
YES, I KNOW! GOOD, ISN'T IT!
WELL?
WELL WHAT? OH... YES...
TOC
I'M FREE!
WE KNOW!
AND SO IT CONTINUES, AND MAY STILL BE CONTINUING, FOR ALL I KNOW...

COMING
NEXT MONTH



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FORTEANTIMES 274

ON SALE 31 MARCH

HUGO PIETTE

TALES FROM THE VAULT

EACH MONTH WE SEND *FORTEAN TIMES* FOUNDER BOB RICKARD DOWN INTO THE DARKEST, COBWEB-RIDDEN DEPTHS OF THE VAULTS OF FORTEAN TOWERS IN SEARCH OF STORIES FROM *FT*'S PAST.

APRIL 1981

At the end of March, an armada of 100 junks set sail for Hong Kong, carrying 4,000 people from Guangdong, on the Chinese mainland. They begged the HK authorities to be allowed to stay until 10 April, when they would return home. The reason for their panicked flight was that astrologers and/or Taoist priests had predicted that a major earthquake would hit the province in that period. British and Chinese officials declared the refugees' fears were groundless and refused them landing. The junks were escorted back to sea; where they went I don't know. We do know, however, that on 9 April, a 10-second quake of 3–4 on the Mercalli scale (approx. 4.2–4.5 Richter) shook Guangdong, with its epicentre just 85 miles (137km) north-east of Hong Kong. **FT35:36**

Depressed and jobless, Romolo Ribolla, 42, of Pisa, sat in his kitchen with a gun, threatening to kill himself. His wife pleaded with him for nearly an hour not to, until he finally burst into tears and flung his gun away. When it hit the floor, the gun went off, killing his wife. **FT42:37**

APRIL 1991

This month's much publicised phenomenon was the "fainting goats" of the American Midwest, specially bred to keel over when surprised. After 15 seconds, the goats revive and act as though nothing had happened. Their lineage dates back to the early 1880s, when a traveller from Nova Scotia brought some fainting goats to Tennessee. He sold them to a local doctor who saved them from extinction. Their use was ingenious; farmers would put one in with a herd of sheep so that if a wolf or coyote attacked, the goat would collapse. The predator would devour the goat and leave the rest of the flock alone. Today, the breed is popular as a pet or curiosity, and there is a Fainting Goat Association for owners. **FT58:18**

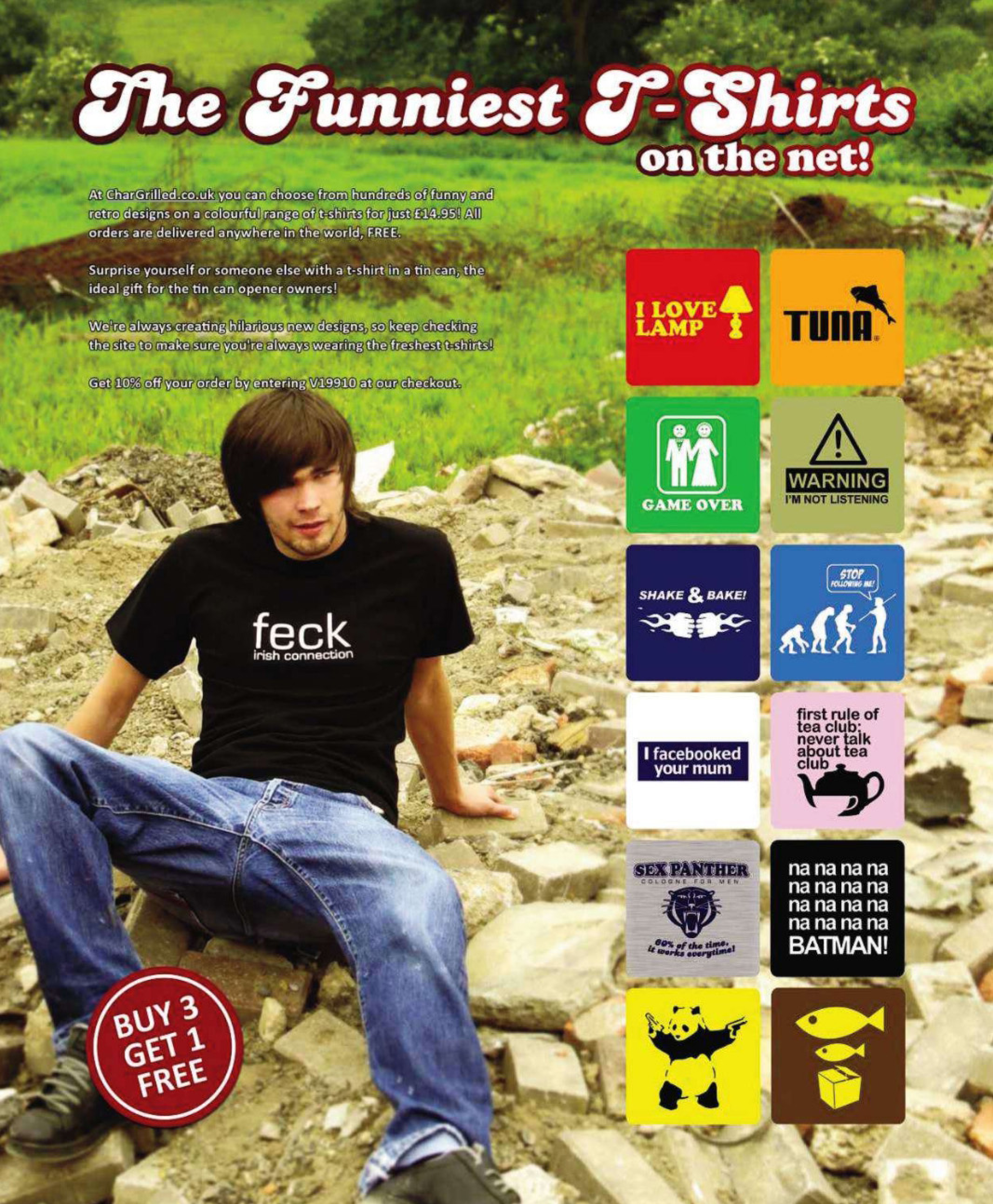
A remarkable tale – that could have come out of classic mythology – came our way from Bangladesh. No less a person that the Fisheries Minister, Abdullah al Noman, said that on 30 April, a cyclone struck the coastal village of Chakoria, killing at least 125,000 people. After long, harrowing searches most of those swept out to sea had been given up for dead. Then, villagers out in boats, still looking for survivors, spotted a dolphin holding up something in its mouth clear of the water. Moving towards it, they saw the 'something' was a baby and still alive. The dolphin continued holding up the baby, allowing them to take it from its jaws. Ashore, the baby was treated in hospital for injuries to the leg caused by the dolphin's life-saving grip. **FT58:21**

APRIL 2001

Here's a puzzling little item. A gravestone found in a car park in Aurora, Illinois, was carved with the name of US Army veteran Chester P Balicki, who died in 1971. When police managed to trace the cemetery in which Chester had been buried, they found a tombstone already in place. The original discovery was made on 1 April, but whether the 'spare' was a stunt of some sort no one seems to have discovered. **FT148:10**

This month saw the demise of one of the UK's oldest UFO groups, the Bristol-based British Flying Saucer Bureau (BFSB). Founded in 1952 by Denis Plunkett, it once boasted around 1,500 members worldwide. Dennis, aged 70 at this time, said he was originally inspired by an advert in the *Daily Mail* placed by Albert Bender, the American ufologist famous for his encounters with the notorious Men in Black; and by the mysterious disappearance of a cousin during a flight across the Andes. Denis claimed that the heyday of UFOs coincided with the rise of international paranoia in the Cold War; that's when the first atomic explosions, he believed, had attracted the attention of ETs. He decided to disband the group because of decreasing attendance at his weekly meetings and a general boredom with UFOs, which he puts down to the burgeoning Internet. "There aren't enough new sightings," he said sadly, "and there are only so many times you can pick over old bones." **FT148:20**

For the second year running, someone staged a horrible mutilation of frogs in two ponds in Lincoln's South Park area. This month more than 100 amphibians were found stamped upon, disembowelled, bisected or burned, some with their legs tied together. Although the RSPCA was aware of both massacres, no culprit or motive was discovered. **FT149:10**



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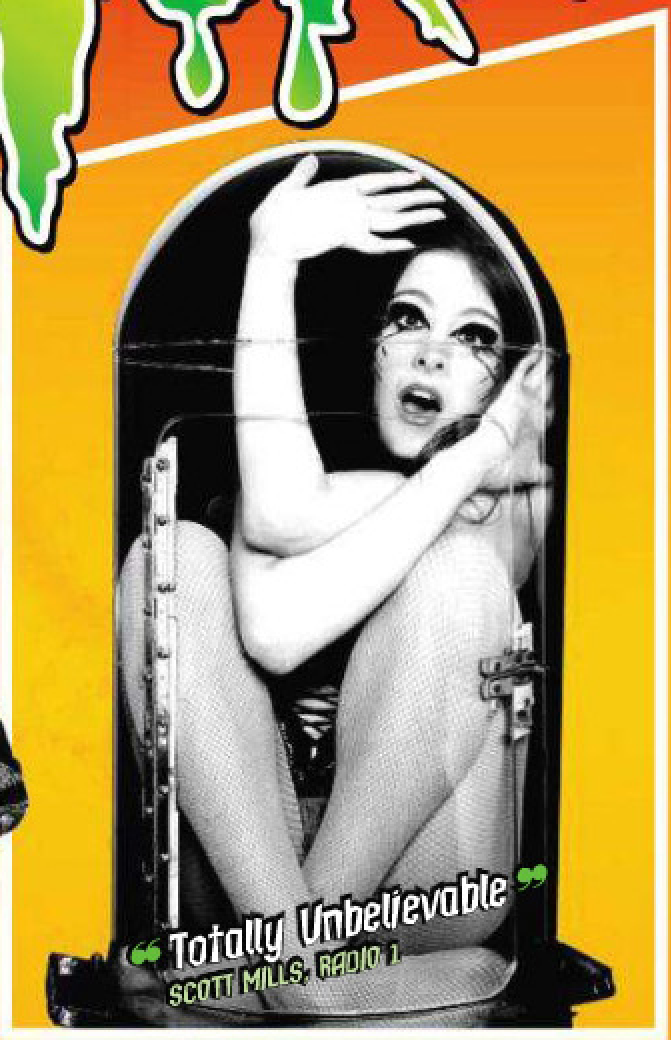
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